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Five short stories

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FIVE SHORT STORIES

by

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INTRODUCTION

The five original stories of this thesis are in that tradition of the short story developed out of the Comedy of Manners which is characterized by wit in the drawing room and boudoir instead of bravery on the battlefield and courage in the senate. The Comedy of Manners in the theater satirizes in a disinterested way the frivolity and the cruelties of an effete society. Its ridicule is directed at any individuals who step beyond the norm of reason and common sense, such as Alceste in Le Misanthrope whose sentiments, while noble, do not take into consideration human nature.

In contrast to the stage play, the short story in the Comedy of Manners tradition often emphasizes the pathos rather than the humor of the unfortunates caught by manners. Since greater depth is given these characters by specific examination of their souls and personalities, the reader is forced into a richer emotional involvement with them. He is frequently moved to compassion for them rather than amusement at them. He is, indeed, not urbane or sophisticated enough not to care. Thus, this kind of short story usually is lacking in that pure comic spirit which is served by the cool detachment, productive of laughter that is

'impersonal and of unrivaled politeness'"[1] in the theater-goer.

Maupassant's "Boule de Suif" is an example of this short story tradition. The story concerns a prostitute whose loyalty to her country is exploited by a group of selfish bourgeois whose etiquette and snobbery do not permit them to be equally courageous. By setting one manner against another--the easy patriotism of the bourgeois against their social snobbery--Maupassant goes beyond manners ironically to examine the real values of these people. But it is because of Maupassant's sharp, precise details that the reader becomes so involved with Boule de Suif, so concerned for her and disgusted with the superficial motives of her companions. This involvement would not be possible in the 17th century theater-goer, who ridiculed Alceste's nobility for passing beyond all reason and common sense.

Anton Chekhov worked in the Comedy of Manners tradition of short story a few years after Maupassant; and more recently, perfecting Chekhov's technique, Katherine Mansfield carried this tradition perhaps to its greatest subtlety of expression by a technique of manipulating the points of view. In her stories of a highly refined society and its victims, she was able to steer a moderate course between Joyce's

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[1] From "An Essay on Comedy" by George Meredith, quoted by John Gassner in "The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," A Treasury of the Theater, ed. John Gassner (New York, 1951), I, p. 387.

stream of consciousness on the one hand and Hemingway's stylized understatement on the other.

The brilliant and brittle dialogue of the play in this tradition is generally missing from the short story since prose fiction does not depend on dialogue for most of its information but allows statement in summary. Much of the "talk" can therefore be internalized. Furthermore, objective "sets" and action on the stage, viewed presumably objectively by the audience must in the short story emerge from the page with precise detail and images which dialogue cannot usually produce.

Just as the viewer generalizes a significant picture from tiny brush strokes of color and tone on the canvas of an impressionist painting, so the reader, shown rather than told, generalizes the details into significant story. He is usually unaware of the extent to which his generalisation has been controlled by the blending of several ways in which the action and "sets" are understood and seen: the narrator's objective view and the character's subjective view. A skilled writer like Mansfield moves in and out of these views smoothly so that the major irony of her work lies to a large extent in the contrast between them.

In a primitive sample of these traditions, "An Upheaval" by Chekhov, the manipulation of the points of view may be examined.

> Mashenka Pavletsky, a young girl who had only just finished her studies at a boarding school,

> returning from a walk to the house of the Kushkins, with whom she was living as a governess, found the household in a terrible turmoil. Mihailo, the porter who opened the door to her, was excited and red as a crab.[2]

These are the narrator's generalities: "young girl," "a boarding school," and so on. The most precise details, "terrible turmoil" and "red as a crab," seem to indicate that the story has moved into the girl's point of view. The story then abruptly returns, apparently to the narrator's editorial comment:

> Mashenka went into her room, and then for the first time in her life, it was her lot to experience in all its acuteness the feeling that is so familiar to persons in dependent positions...[3]

We know that this is the narrator's more objective view because Mashenka herself does not realize what is happening at this point. Then gradually we move into her view again:

> Mashenka looked around the room with wondering eyes, and, unable to understand it, not knowing what to think, shrugged her shoulders, and turned cold with dismay. What had Fedosya Vassilyevna been looking for in her work-bag?[4]

The internal rhetorical questions which follow appear clumsy to the reader of Mansfield. Shortly afterwards, we learn more smoothly through Mashenka's subjective view that she was particularly embarrassed to think that her mistress had found the sweetmeats she had left under her pillow.

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[2]Anton Chekhov, "An Upheaval," in Fifty Great Short Stories, ed. Milton Crane (New York, 1955), p. 296.

[3]Chekhov, p. 296.

[4]Ibid., p. 297.

The viewpoint drifts from the narrator's objectivity to Mashenka's subjectivity in the following remark about the husband:

> He stood in the pitiful position of a dependent and hanger-on, even with the servants, and his apology to Mashenka meant nothing either.[5]

Because of this blending of points of view, the reader by the end of the story has a very specific picture, given by both the narrator and the girl, of a household so dominated by the wife that the husband must steal and pawn the jewelry he has given her. The girl, Mashenka, does not understand the situation since she has the husband's deception only as it affects her. But the reader, controlled by the narrator's objective comments, does understand. The final sentence: "Half an hour later she Mashenka was on her way"[6] leaves the reader with a sense of the irony of the situation and a sadness which goes far beyond any concern for the girl to center on the husband. Mashenka, after all, is "on her way."

In "Daughters of the Late Colonel" Mansfield sacrifices external tension by developing the characters and blending the points of view in a way far more controlled than Chekhov's. From the beginning the reader knows that Constantia and Josephine will never free themselves from the domination of their dead father and their fear of living normal lives. The suspense of the story depends on <u>how</u> and <u>why</u> they are trapped,

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[5]Ibid., p. 300.

[6]Ibid., p. 302.

rather than on *what* will be done about it.

Again the reader is thrown right into the story but with even less explanation than in Chekhov:

> The week after was one of the busiest weeks of their lives. Even when they went to bed it was only their bodies that lay down and rested; their minds went on, thinking things out, talking things over, wondering, deciding, trying to remember where...[7]

The reader assumes that a serious incident, perhaps a tragedy, has affected two or more people in whose minds he appears to be. This has been "one of the busiest weeks of their lives," and the reader is now prepared by suspense to focus on who *they* are:

> Constantia lay like a statue, her hands by her sides, her feet just overlapping each other, the sheet up to her chin. She stared at the ceiling.[8]

The withdrawn view of Constantia, "like a statue," and with "feet just overlapping," seems to be the narrator's more objective view. As the story continues, this peculiarly static posture of Constantia, *as if laid out*, a tiny brush stroke meaningless in itself, becomes more and more significant.

> "Do you think that father would mind if we gave his top hat to the porter?"[9]

Following the solemn introduction, the trivial conversation

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[7] Katherine Mansfield, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," in *The Art of Modern Fiction*, Alternate Edition, ed. R. B. West, Jr., and R. W. Stallman (New York, 1957), p. 103.

[8] *Mansfield*, p. 103.

[9] *Ibid.*

is humorous, even macabre in its relief of the painful irony of the narrator's description.

The blending of the points of view, as in Chekhov, allows the reader throughout the story to appreciate the irony of the contrast. Constantly the point of view shifts from the subjective view of one or both of the sisters to the more objective view of the narrator so that by the end, the reader alone makes the ironic generalisation. Because of the narrator's objective view, the reader is far more aware than are Constantia or Josephine of their plight. Therefore, although he can laugh at the situation of the sisters, he nevertheless sympathizes with them; it is the composition of the tiny particular details the reader has been given which has controlled his overall generalization and forced this generalisation unconsciously upon him.

By flashbacks Mansfield pulls us into the sisters' stiff, mannered, and cruel world. It is such a rigid world that they cannot take Communion in the livingroom for fear the doorbell will ring, and they wonder whether they should dye their dressing gowns for fear that the postman might see them, or Kate, the cook, because it is "hypocritical" to go around in black outside and not in private. They are less concerned about the loss of their father than how they are supposed to mourn for him, that is, for their manners.

When the infantile rhythms and exaggerated expressions

of the childlike minds of Constantia and Josephine--"awfully," "terribly," "quite," "just"--become too sticky, the narrator withdraws to present her point of view, blended, for instance, with Kate's. This is comparable to the Chekhov passage about the husband in which the narrator's and Mashenka's views merge.

> And proud young Kate, the enchanted princess, came in to see what the old tabbies wanted now. She snatched away their plates of mock something or other and slapped down a white terrified blanc-mange.[10]

Control of the reader's total impression from tiny, vivid strokes of detail, subjective and objective blended, is so convincing that the narrator can pare words to the minimum. She has no need to say how the sisters speak here because the reader unwittingly supplies the stage directions himself from his previous knowledge of the sisters.

> "Don't you think perhaps..." she began. But Josephine interrupted her. "I was wondering if now..." she murmured. They stopped and waited for each other.
>
> "Go on, Con," said Josephine.
>
> "No, no, Jug; after you," said Constantia.
>
> "No, say what you were going to say. You began," said Josephine.
>
> "I...I'd rather hear what you were going to say first," said Constantia.
>
> "Don't be absurd, Con."
>
> "Really, Jug."
>
> "Connie!"

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[10] Ibid., p. 110.

"Oh, Jug!"[11]

Nor does Mansfield need to comment on the overall scene. It is clear that the women have died already, emotionally, but as thoroughly as their father.

The opponents of the tradition of Comedy of Manners say depreciatingly, "It's only manners." But such an attitude surely indicates a serious misreading of the term. A Comedy of Manners is not a humorous story, or play, about manners. It is a serious probing of the validity of manners at the expense of human nature. In School for Scandal, for example, Sheridan examines the heartlessness of the urbane man of sentiment, Joseph Surface. Mansfield is not laughing at Josephine and Constantia, nor is she encouraging the reader to do so. She is exploring the cruelties of highly refined manners which lead to emotional death.

It is true that there are rarely scenes of great passion in the Comedy of Manners, and that such as there are are dealt with on the whole by understatement. But to insist that military adventure in India, say, is more exciting that the unfolding, layer by layer, of the mind and emotions of a character appears questionable. The activity within the human mind can be far more violent than any action of any adventure story. In one of the first defenses of the Comedy of Manners, Dryden wrote in 1666:

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[11] Ibid., p. 123.

> 'Tis a great mistake in us to believe the French present no part of the action on the stage; every alteration or crossing of a design, every new-sprung passion, and turn of it, is a part of the action, and much the noblest, except we conceive nothing to be action till the players come to blows, as if the painting of the hero's mind were not more properly the poet's work than the strength of his body.[12]

For all its murder and mayhem, Kipling's "Man Who Would Be King," lacks intense drama because the reader has not been given sufficient data about the two Englishmen--he has not been inside them--so that he does not care to understand them or to become involved with them. The reader is told, not shown the facts. In Henry James' sense, he does not <u>experience</u>[13] the story. Instead he is told what the story means by very direct implication. On the other hand, Constantia and Josephine's minds have been sifted to reveal such significance in their insignificance that the reader can believe in them and feel himself in them.

To say that a Monet painting of a cathedral is not good because it is not a Delacroix splashing of <u>Liberté, Egalité, et Fraternité</u> does not take into account the aesthetic values behind either the technique or the intention of the artist. To attack a short story in the Comedy of Manners tradition for not being an adventure story--or any other kind of story--would appear to contradict Conrad who stated that the artist's

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[12] John Dryden, "An Essay on Dramatic Poesy," in <u>Selected Works of John Dryden</u>, ed. W. Frost (New York, 1955), p. 351.

[13] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in <u>American Poetry and Prose</u>, Vol. II, ed. N. Foerster (Cambridge, 1947), p. 1142.

justification lies in his attempt to find in any material that "rescued fragment"[14] of truth which appeals to our sense of pity, and, ultimately, to our sense of solidarity with mankind.

The stories which follow this introduction describe a world of lonely people, lonely because of some weakness: Ed Steven's cowardice, for example. The assumption is that individuals must be close to others or they will die as Constantia and Josephine have died--of starvation for love. This contact, or closeness, however, is impossible before the individuals are honest with themselves; therefore, honesty to oneself is a supreme value in this world.

These stories veer from the Comedy of Manners tradition in that they are not so much clear satire of manners and society as comment upon the loneliness in our society. That is, like some of Maupassant, they go beyond manners to something more fundamentally human. As a rule, the point of view has been kept consistently within the main character of each story; this technique is somewhat inconsistent with the technique as discussed in Chekhov and Mansfield. The writer, therefore, has not utilized one of the main techniques of the short story in the Comedy of Manners tradition: shifting points of view, which allow the rich irony. Nevertheless,

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[14]Joseph Conrad, "Preface: The Condition of Art," in Story, Poem, Essay: A University Reader, ed. B. B. Hoover and D. S. Taylor (New York, 1957), p. 479.

other qualities of the Comedy of Manners will be noted in these stories.

"A Cup of Tea" falls most clearly into this tradition, and, therefore, is the most useful for discussion. From the opening of "A Cup of Tea," the reader is held within Miss Carmichael's view.

> Miss Helen Carmichael rinsed out the Wedgwood coffee cup and leaned it gently against the saucer in the drying rack. Unhurriedly she undid her yellow everyday apron as she turned from the kitchen. She'd already picked up the apartment so she could relax when she returned from school that afternoon. The soft blues and white of the living room would quiet her while she sipped her tea and read the mail. She always laid out her clothes the night before at the foot of her bed on her linen hope chest. Now she quickly... pulled over her head the skirt of her new suit, a red and grey checked tweed. She was pleased with it, though some might call it too loud. The children would like it, she was sure.[15]

Essentially this is the picute of a woman who appreciates "good things." She handles the Wedgwood coffee cup "gently." She is self-disciplined, a woman whose life, even in moments of relaxation, falls into a schedule. She is quite vain, the reader may guess from her comment about the suit, and she depends heavily on the school children for her emotional security. "The children would like it, her suit, she was sure." Her prissy, rigid manner, as indicated by her schedule, and the emphasis on the Miss in her name, Miss Helen Carmichael, are contrasted to this vanity and the reference to her linen

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[15]Mary M. Jasperson, "A Cup of Tea," in Five Short Stories.

hope chest. The first paragraph introduces the tension in the story: the problem of what Helen will do about her singleness and how well she understands it. When the controlling point of view has been established, the reader sees everything as Helen sees it, and he should also see it ironically beyond her view.

Helen is conscious subjectively of sterility about her: the buckled sidewalk on Franklin Street, the furniture-polish smell of the school, and Miss Roger's stick-like manner, however, the reader sees, ironically, what she does not: her vanity, her physical attraction towards the young Italian-boy--although the writer could have made this more clear by closer subjective detail about Mazzini's appearance--and the major irony of the story: her misunderstanding of how she feels and Mazzini's awareness of her feeling. In the end, she is forced to realize that she will never marry, and that she is as sterile as Franklin Street, the school, and Miss Rogers. With this awareness, she can finally begin her life on an honest basis. Mechanically, she picks up the tea things after Mazzini has left and recalls the papers she will correct after supper.

By means of the same technique, the other stories of this thesis deal with similar questions of fundamental human goodness and honesty.

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I

A CUP OF TEA

Miss Helen Carmichael rinsed out the Wedgwood coffee cup and leaned it gently against the saucer in the drying rack. Unhurriedly she undid her yellow everyday apron as she turned from the kitchen. She'd already picked up the apartment so she could relax when she returned from school that afternoon. The soft blues and white of the living room would quiet her while she sipped her tea and read the mail. She always laid out her clothes the night before at the foot of her bed on her linen hope chest. Now she quickly pulled on her underclothes, gleaming white, though she had to wash them in the sink, buttoned her freshly starched white blouse and pulled over her head the skirt of her new suit, a red and gray checked tweed. She was pleased with it, though some might call it too loud. The children would like it, she was sure.

After the long summer it was good to sense the discipline of the first day of school when things fell into their patterns, and she had no quiet moments to herself at dusk when she could wonder how it might have been if Greg had not been shot down over the South Pacific early in the war; how it might have been if they had married, or living together as they both

had wanted, and she had born his child; but mostly she pictured how love would come to her again and she would have a real home someday. Not just an apartment like this.

When she had first heard Greg was dead, she had thought she would never marry and had thrown herself into teaching, knowing it would leave her little time to pity herself. The sorrow lessened in time, of course, and she grew ready to change her mind when the right man came along. But he had not appeared, and she was now thirty-seven, and sometimes she wondered if she was just fooling herself to think he would.

"Ha, Vanity," she would laugh into the mirror over the bathroom sink in the morning, turning on the 150 Watt overhead light. "You're more afraid of losing your youth, Helen Carmichael." Or "Silly Helen, you're too old to marry now--who'd want you?" And she'd laugh.

But it was only a half laugh, and she hugged the warmer thought to herself. He would come. She knew it. She learned to master her feelings while she waited, even to ignore the ache she felt when in spring the early gold and purple crocuses pushed up through the cold, moist earth--new life--or when she woke in winter to find the ground white with sparkling snow and the smallest twigs glimmering in ice, or the nights when she lay awake watching the restless leaves shadowed by streetlight on her wall, and wanted someone near

to fold her in his arms and hold her close. But it became easier as time past, and she found she could wait, keeping herself for him alone. In the meantime there was her work.

When she'd moved out to Morristown from Newark to teach seven years before, her married friends at first had tried to fix her up with the eligible bachelors in town, and she hadn't objected, thinking one of them might be the right one: someone quiet, yet fun, charming yet deeply honest; a man whom she could respect and love completely. But for one reason or another none was what she wanted, and her friends gradually gave up matchmaking and invited her by herself to their parties. When the evening was over, rather than accept a ride, she would dart out the door saying she wanted the fresh air, and she'd take off as if there were someone waiting at home who would worry if she were late.

This particular morning these thoughts fluttered somewhere in the back of Helen's mind and caused her now to feel consciously happy for her work. She had already planned exercises to correct after supper, and she had reading to get ahead on. At 3:15 she closed the door behind her with an extra tug that reminded her to call Mr. Rivers Saturday to plane it down as her tool kit had nothing heavy enough. A girl living by herself had to keep things like that. She walked briskly down the steps, blinking at the sun which filtered through the glass-curtained door at the bottom. In her right hand she held her briefcase, and in her left, the

three letters she had written the evening before to former students now in the middle of their first confusing week at the University.

It was one of those lovely early fall days, cloudless with the leaves just beginning to turn crisp before they colored, and the wind rustling through them. Helen kept her eyes down as she walked over to the school because in recent years great twisted tree roots had buckled the cement pavement. Franklin Place used to be called nice residential with its white clapboard houses and porches the children played on when it rained, and the hedges of clipped barberry. But when they changed the zoning laws, the old families had moved out to the hills and sold their homes to real estate men who broke them into co-operative apartments, and in turn sold them to young married couples or to teachers or retired people who moved into town to die. Helen knew she could sell hers easily to whomever they got at school to replace her when she married.

The school building that morning smelled, as they all do after summer vacation, of scrubbed woodwork and waxed floors and strong furniture polish. She hung her coat in the crowded teacher's room, greeted the women in a quick general way, and hurried on up to her room on the second floor, the juniors' home room. How silly it was to feel the butterflies after fifteen years of teaching. She drew a deep breath and opened the door.

Sue Bishop and Judy Thomas in the front row pulled their blonde heads apart as she walked by them to the desk, and the rest of the room quieted, too.

"Good morning," she said to the six rows of 16- and 17-year olds, tanned and starched and colorfully dressed: the girls with their hair shining and noses faintly powdered, the boys with their hair slicked back above pimply foreheads.

"Good morning, Miss Carmichael," rippled back. She moved on across the floor to shut the window down partway before the papers blew. With the window opener still in her hand, she swung around in front of the bookcase and surveyed the room. The boys, led by the Allen twins, of course, had taken over the back seats, and the girls, as usual, except for Barbara and Sarah Williams, had filled in the front rows. She liked their expectant expressions, and she responded happily to their delight in starting anything new. There were only a few she didn't recognize. In the morning she would bring back the ivy for the bookcase, and she would pin up the pictures she'd saved from Life over the summer. With some colorful maps about and an exhibit on the back table it would be her own room again.

She felt the students' eyes follow her movements, and she was glad she had worn the new suit. She was glad, too, for the natural wave that was soft and brown about her face, and for her figure, kept trim and neat because she knew even an older man cared about that, however much he might love her.

Back at the desk she nodded at each child as she called roll. Thirty-four this term, a heavy load. When she had finished and was about to pick up the assignment sheet, a long plaid arm in the very back raised, the rest of the boy slumped into his chair.

"Yes?" she asked.

"You forgot me, Miss Carmichael." Judy and Sue turned around to look. His voice was low and deep, and she peered over the other students to see whom she'd left off her list. And then she recognised him. Jim Mazzini. Still in school despite all the talk last year. He sat lackadaisically, broad-shouldered with hair curly and very black, and the deep olive complexion of southern Italy. His feet were thrust under the chair in front, his back stretched in one long hypotenuse.

"I didn't know you were back, Jim. I'm sorry."

He nodded slowly and fastened his deep blue eyes directly on her. Almost flustered, she groped for the usual words to address the class, but none came, and she turned quickly to the blackboard behind her desk.

"Miss Helen Carmichael," she wrote in neat manuscript and drew a line underneath with the long yellow chalk, still flat on the ends. When she turned again she was composed and able to begin in her natural voice.

She remembered that Jim Mazzini had spent two years as a sophomore, to Charlotte Rogers' distress, and she could

see how Jim would have upset poor Charlotte with his relaxed air of authority, aside from the other reason. All morning, she found herself talking directly to him, or after saying something, glancing first for his response. Or when she asked if there were questions, she would look at Jim first. But he never opened his mouth except to whisper to Sara Williams who sat next to him. At noon, Helen waited a few minutes, fiddling with papers on her desk thinking he might want to speak to her alone, but he strolled on out of the room, one hand resting lightly on Sara's shoulder.

What an advantage that boy has, she thought as she walked downstairs to lunch--most of the others with their fuzzy chins still and bumps. And he doesn't seem to hesitate to let the girls know it. She wondered if he had the imagination to match his intense Mediterranean eyes, and during lunch she caught herself glancing across the cafeteria trying to find his curly black head.

Afterwards in the cloakroom she spoke about him to Charlotte, who blocked all of the walnut-framed mirror, putting on her natural-colored lipstick, her lips puckering. Helen noticed her hand slipped in the corner of her mouth when she asked. Miss Charlotte Rogers had taught at Morristown High for twenty-eight years. Each year she grew primmer and more wooden. When she retired, they would hang a gold watch about her neck for service, and they would set her in the corner--like a stick. Helen was glad she had a different

sort of future.

They were alone in the cloakroom, and it was a relief after the busy morning of new books and classes, and the aptitude tests. The sun streamed through the windows high above the basin and caught flying motes of dust. Way outside sounded the shouts of an early football game, muted, and Helen hoped some of her boys were wearing off the extra energy she had suppressed during the morning.

"What about Jim?" Miss Rogers countered.

"Well, what kind of boy is he, really?"

Helen watched Miss Rogers inspect her teeth for the spinach they'd had for lunch.

"Well, Helen, you know, don't you, about...well, he's wild if you know what I mean." Miss Rogers always talked around a subject that might embarrass her. "You remember the little Richards girl they sent to Orange in August... to have a baby?" she whispered and drew away quickly from the mirror to wash her hands.

Helen jockeyed for position and reached for her comb from the handbag open on the table. "Uh huh," she answered through the bobby pin in her teeth.

"Well, you heard he denied it, and he said he wouldn't marry her, and they couldn't prove anything, but they say he is the baby's father." Miss Rogers paused and her eyes glinted. "And I think it's just criminal to let him back in school. They don't have any right to expose all those

innocent little girls to him."

Helen pushed the bobby pin into place. "Oh Heavens, Charlotte! You sound as if he had the measles or something. And those girls aren't all that naive. Everyone knew Judy Richards was a little tramp to begin with."

Miss Rogers sucked in her breath. "No telling what he's carrying," she said darkly.

Helen stared at her through the reflection in the mirror. "Why, Charlotte, maybe he just needs understanding. It's not easy to grow up that fast."

"Oh, he doesn't seem to mind," Miss Rogers highpitched voice jerked indignantly. "Look how those sweet little girls idolize him. They think he's some kind of Apollo." She blotted most of her pale lipstick off on a paper towel. "And I think it's disgusting."

Helen hadn't worked in Newark Public School #12 for nothing, and she prided herself on being realistic about teenagers. She granted that some, like Mazzini, were more mature than others, physically, and therefore could make more trouble, but underneath they were just children and needed guidance, not blind censure. In her most professional tone she asked, "Do you remember his aptitude scores?"

With a sigh Miss Rogers explained that his IQ was very high. "But wait till you see what he turns out," she said. "I told him once he shouldn't settle for anything below an A,

and he laughed at me...right at me." Her voice was watery. "And between you and me, Helen, I passed him because I couldn't stand him around that room anymore." She whirled to face Helen. "Go ahead. Just try to help him. But you're asking for trouble if you want my advice."

The warning bell for classes rang, and Helen took one last glance in the mirror before she followed the other woman into the corridor. During study hour that afternoon she hunted up Jim's record in Mr. Anderson's office and found that it confirmed what Charlotte had said. He had repeated both freshman and sophomore years despite an above-average Intelligence Quotient. The records stated he was nineteen, male, white, and that his teeth were approved by the school nurse. Stepfather and guardian: Francisco Pietro. Mother: Maria Pietro. Seven stepbrothers and sisters, all younger. There was a brief typewritten note attached, stating that the Pietro family were on county relief, and that Maria Pietro, Jim's own mother, had died the year before, 1956.

That was all. Disappointed, Helen read through the papers again and went down to the school library to check the obituary notes in the Daily Record to see if there was more. The last paragraph of the short article stated that "Mrs. Pietro's son by a former marriage, Jim Mazzini, was not present at the funeral." Helen frowned as she read this

last, quickly pretending she was reading the social notes, for she felt Ethel, the librarian, watching her.

There were other problem students in her class, and before the first week was over they were bringing their troubles in. Some she advised, and for others she spoke to their families, but mostly she just listened. They kept her so busy with her other class preparations, however, she had little time to think of herself or her future when she would be out of teaching, except sometimes to wonder if she might miss this part of it.

Jim Mazzini continued to ignore the sympathy she would have given if he just asked for it. When she told him to stay after class for help on a paper or to discuss a test he had failed, he stayed no longer than necessary. And during class he was as quiet as that first day, listening to every word, his eyes fixed on her. If he were absent she missed him and at once wondered if he were bored with the class, and when he returned, she never requested the written excuse.

She was working Wednesday afternoon before Thanksgiving at school on lesson plans, with the building quiet as only a school can be when the children leave early. The pungent smell of smoke from burning leaves drifted into her empty classroom, and she could hear the rake in the bushes beneath her window. About four she rose to go down the hall to the

library for a book on English history she wanted to assign. The door was slightly ajar, which seemed strange, as Ethel always locked it when she left, but Helen didn't think anything of it at first.

A few books lay scattered on the table, and the newspaper was spread open to the comics. The window was shut and it seemed stuffy and dusty. There was barely enough light, but she knew just where the book she wanted was shelved, so she didn't bother with the overhead lights. Her footsteps were soundless on the rug as she started around the end of the long reading table to the History shelf. Suddenly she heard a scraping over between the stacks, like coat buttons brushing against the floor. She stopped to listen curiously. Then she heard a whisper.

"There's no one around so just relax." She recognized Jim Mazzini's voice.

"I don't know, Jim." The girl's voice came indistinctly. "Mother will want to know why I'm so late. I think I'd better go."

At first Helen though she had imagined it, but then she heard the buttons again and the sound of heavy breathing. A wave of intense anger tightened her throat, and her head started to pound so that she could hardly think what to do. When she pulled herself together, she walked over to the switches by the door, flicked on the lights, and marched down the stacks looking down each section, afraid of what she

would find.

They had heard her and were pushing away from each other when she found them. Sara William's face was crimson, and she was pulling at her rumpled clothes. Jim watched her, frowning. Helen snapped her fingers.

"Just what do you two think you're doing in here?" she demanded, wishing she could take back the words as soon as she spoke them.

Jim leaned back casually against the books. One dropped through the other side of the shelf. "I dunno, Miss Carmichael. What'd you have in mind?"

Wordless she swung on Sara harshly. "What's the meaning of this, Sara Williams?"

"Oh, Ma'm, he didn't do anything to me. He didn't." Sara pleaded. "I told him not to touch me," she sniffled. "I did, Ma'm, oh please don't tell anyone." She half-sobbed into her bare hands and rubbed her face against her plaid blouse sleeve.

"Oh, shut up," Jim said roughly to her. "She's right ...I didn't do a thing to her."

In relief Helen fought down the ridiculous impulse to gigle hysterically. "Sara," she said, "You're not only silly. You're stupid! Don't you know what kind of mess you could get yourself into?" The girl's eyes widened, and she nodded. "Now get your coat on. And if ever again I hear

this sort of thing about you, you can be sure everybody in this school and all of Morristown will know about it."

Sara stood up quickly and slipped out of the room as fast as she could. They heard her running down the hall. Jim took his time standing up. He stuck his hands casually into his Levi pockets and rocked back on his heels. Irritated, Helen lashed at him.

"And as for you," she said, "If I hear any more of this kind of thing about you, I'll see to it you're hauled into court on a morals charge."

Jim's lips curled into a half-grin. "You can't prove anything," he said.

"Can't I?" She paused. "What right have you to get pregnant any little girl you want to?"

"I never touched one that didn't want me to," he answered, adding helplessly, "But there's been quite a few that haven't minded." He ran one hand through his curly hair.

She could have slapped him. "You think they really know what they're getting into? What about the Richards' girl last year, who had her baby over the summer and now at fifteen has to support it by herself? Who'll marry her now, do you suppose?" She raised her voice and stared him down. "Answer me! Haven't you any feelings for anyone but yourself?"

Jim's smile faded, and he looked at her intently, then away. He rubbed his palms against his Levis jerkily as if

to dry them, and he said, still not looking right at her, "I don't mean bad."

Her anger left her. She almost reached her hand to him. He waited, head bowed, as if he expected punishment. "No, of course you don't." She walked back to one of the chairs beside the reading table, motioning him to join her.

He sat stiffly, inarticulate, his long flat fingers running back and forth along the groove in the edge of the table. His face was flushed as he looked quickly at her and down again. She had waited two months for this moment, and now the circumstances seemed unimportant.

"Oh Jim, why do you try to act so tough and smart?" she asked softly, aching to stop the restlessness of his fingers with her own hand on his.

He took a deep breath. "I dunno," he said at last. "I...I just can't help it."

"How do you mean?" she asked quietly, knowing that if she waited he might talk.

"Oh, being like you said. Like in school." He watched her expression carefully and when she nodded gently, he added, "But I don't think it's right to have to work for a family that ain't your own." His voice choked. "She's the only one ever cared about me...and she's gone now." Helen had to lean closer to hear him. "She...she died last year."

"Was it your mother?" She began to understand.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah, my mother. When the last baby came."

"I'm awfully sorry." They were so close their knees almost touched. "What...what a very sad thing." She thought a minute wondering what she could say. "But it's not anyone's fault. How can it be, Jim? And you just hurt yourself."

He glared. "You don't understand at all. I won't help them." He spoke vehemently. "Nobody can make me."

"You mean you'd flunk on purpose so as to stay in school and not help them?"

"Yeah. What do you care?" He looked straight at her and she felt a warmth as if she had been caressed, and almost without thinking, more to convince him she did care, she put her hand over his and held his fingers close to stop them.

"I care, Jim, I do," she said earnestly. "Won't you let me help you now?" She glanced around at the books and the magazine rack. It was a gloomy room, and outside it was becoming dark. Jim's hand stilled, and the tense lines about his mouth disappeared.

"Will you come back with me to my place?" she said. "We can talk much better there, and the janitor locks up here right at five."

Jim jerked his head up and drew his hand away as if he'd been burned. He had a peculiar expression about his mouth

all at once, and a wise, hard look grew in his eyes. "Yeah, sure," he said, glancing past her out the window. The streetlights turned on as he looked.

Helen didn't understand the sudden coldness in his voice. It was as if he had changed back to the tough unyielding boy she had found earlier with Sara. "I'll have to stop by the store," she said rising, "You go ahead, and I'll meet you at home."

He was waiting for her when she came up the stairs leaning against the top banister, watching her. "I'll take those," he said reaching for the groceries, his fingers touching her arm by mistake. It was suffocatingly close in the small hallway, and when she unlocked the door, she pushed it open in relief and ran into the living room. It was chilly. She turned up the thermostat.

"Here," she said. "Just set them on the table in the kitchen." She gestured around the corner.

Jim brushed by her. "Nice place you have," he said, standing in the middle of the rug with the groceries. He looked so huge, as if he might crush the chair he went to sit in, and she wondered if his boots were clean. He studied the blue curtains and the white flowered chins slipcovers she had spent so many evenings making, knowing they would someday fit into a much larger room. She had picked up the birch log herself one fall afternoon while walking in the

woods, and for some time she had waited for a cool enough evening to light it.

"Will you fix the fire?" she asked pleasantly, nodding toward the whitewashed brick fireplace. "I'll be ready in a minute."

She hung her coat in the closet and glancing at her reflection in the hall mirror felt pleased with her high color. On impulse she changed out of her suit blouse into a dressy white Cashmere sweater she knew was becoming. When she returned to the living room, Jim was still fussing with the fire, and she felt strangely nervous watching his strong hands turn the logs to crumple the paper under them. In the kitchen she filled the kettle for tea and carefully placed the cake and the brownies--men always liked brownies--on the silver dish. She pulled a lemon from the grocery sack and sliced it, setting each piece in a circular pattern on the plate, and she filled the sugar bowl from the canister. She didn't take sugar herself in her tea.

"Just make yourself comfortable," she called. "I'll be right there."

She added the cream and sugar to the tray. The water was beginning to stir on the stove, and she measured the tea quickly into the silver strainer. She hummed softly to herself. Outside it was black, and Mrs. Larson waved across the backyard as she pulled down her kitchen shades. Helen

felt at peace. When she peered around the corner, she saw that Jim had stretched back against the cushions in the middle of the sofa and was flicking through a magazine. He'd placed his brown jacket aside when he fixed the logs and rolled his shirt sleeves. His arms were dark, and when he turned the page, little muscles moved above his wrist.

"There's a light on your left side," she said.

Silently he switched it on.

When she brought the tray in, she felt his eyes on her and in sudden confusion her face burned. She set the tray down on the table and sat beside him, expecting him to move to one end of the sofa, but he remained where he was, and she had to reach across him for the tea pot.

Abruptly he spoke. "Miss Carmichael, what are you being so nice for?"

"What do you mean, Jim?" She poured the water and dipped the strainer up and down. The tea leaves floated in the wrinkles of the light tea scum which formed.

"Oh, like asking me here."

She reached across him again for the plate of lemon. "Why,..I do it with all my students sometime during the year."

"I never heard of it before," he said bluntly, shifting his body so that his leg touched hers.

For the first time she felt uneasy, but she drew away gently, thinking it was an accident. "Will you have lemon,

Jim?" she asked, trying to keep her voice normal.

Without answering he reached back and switched off the light. Then he turned his body sideways and pushing against her, pinned her into the corner of the sofa. She tried to hit him away.

"Oh no you don't!" he said and caught her wrist roughly.

"Jim," she cried, struggling, "no...let go of me."

"What are you talking about?" He reached his arms behind her as his face bore down on her.

"Stop, Jim...No..." she cried again, twisting her head frantically from side to side.

"Isn't this what you been asking for?"

"Oh, no..." she moaned.

"Then why'd you pay me so much attention in class?" he accused, his breath warm on her face and neck. "Why were you so sweet and kind in the library? Why do you watch me all the time? Why'd you ask me up here?" he flung the questions at her angrily, each one harsher, and in conscious horror she knew he was right. But the longing she had believed she had forgotten swept over her. For years hadn't she ached for a man's arms about her, for the violence of love, and the closeness?

All at once it was as if another Helen Carmichael stood across the room, watching--laughing. Had she waited, saving herself, for <u>him</u>? She began to push against Jim, fighting

his lips, jabbing at him with her chin, trying to pull her right arm free. But the more she struggled the tighter he held her. Finally she stopped.

"Oh, Jim. I...please. I mustn't." He loosed one arm from behind her and slid it up inside her sweater. "No...No. Wait please, wait." She gasped. "I'm to be married. You musn't.

Jim pulled away. "You're what?" he demanded incredulously. "Who?"

"I...I don't know," she said, hesitating.

Suddenly he released her, letting her fall against the sofa back, and burst out laughing. "Who'd ever marry you?" he choked at last.

As she watched him, the bitterness welled up inside her, and she felt her strength drift away with all her hope and faith in the next year and the years beyond that one. Her whole life. And trying desperately to hold her dream, she asked him why then he had looked at her like that.

"Like what?"

"You know," she said. "In class. You were always watching me."

His voice was bitter. "I just thought I could talk to you," he said, "The other guys said you were real nice to talk to. I thought you really liked me. That you'd...listen to me." He stood abruptly. "But I found you out when you

asked me up here. You couldn't fool me with all that sweet talk."

There was nothing to answer. She felt as if she had been rolling in the street, and then she lost all control. Burying her face in her hands, she sobbed without tears.

"Miss Carmichael?" he said gently with deep feeling. "Please won't you stop?"

But the sobs racked her so she hardly heard him. She felt that if she didn't stop, she might start screaming.

He grabbed her roughly by the shoulders and started shaking her until she caught her breath and stared at him open-mouthed.

"I'm...sorry, Miss Carmichael," he said. "I'm real sorry. I don't mean what I said...about your not getting married. That wasn't true."

Her mind slowly cleared, and she shook her head, rubbing her forehead with her hand. "No, Jim it is," she said finally. "I'm all right now. It's...it's not your fault. You'd better go, don't you think?"

Without another word he picked up his jacket and walked over to the door, turning back when he opened it, his body framed against the light in the hall.

"Nobody will every know I was here--from me," he said, his voice different, years older. The door closed, and she heard his footsteps on the stairs.

Helen sat alone staring at the tea and cake in front of her, shivering. The fire was almost out. In the end, maybe, it was better to know than play that game with herself. She cried some and wiped her tears with the napkin Jim had discarded, unused. After awhile she rose--a little woodenly, like Charlotte Rogers--to put away the tea. She would correct their assignments after she changed into her other clothes.

II

THE EMERALD BROOCH

As a young woman Aunt Carolyn was quite beautiful, with creamy skin and hair golden, as the morning sun across the Connecticut River, swept up proudly to set off the sapphire tiara Uncle Robert gave her when they married. Father said that in those years her black eyes flashed sparks of fire, and I believed him.

But I knew Aunt Carolyn when she was no longer beautiful and her eyes had faded to sand color. She had not, as my mother pointed out, aged gracefully, but through the years had become increasingly difficult. After Uncle Robert died and she inherited the money, she perfected a habit of lashing out at anyone in the family, telling all exactly what she thought of them--usually not complimentary at all--and waiting for them to creep back humbly. When she found she could say or do anything at all, that they would rather fawn than work for their living, she grew to despise them. Yet by some deep sense of family loyality and obligation she almost completely supported Father's older brother, Uncle George, and his younger sister, Aunt Doreen, with Jane, her daughter. After she died, the money was divided evenly among them.

She was Father's aunt actually and the only one of his parents' generation left in his family. "The meanest one, of course," he used to say half-admiringly, knocking his pipe against his shoe to send a shower of brown onto the rug and my mother into the pantry for a brush. Years ago he had challenged Aunt Carolyn's authority in front of the whole family and told her in no uncertain terms she acted just like a spoiled child and that he for one was not at all interested in her money, and would not accept it if she handed to him on a silver platter. And she had backed down. He ignored her royally after that, usually paying a duty call--without Mother, who refused to go--once a year on her birthday, January fourteenth. He came home from these parties a nervous wreck, and I had to go upstairs so as not to upset him more.

One such evening when I came in to say good night in my pajamas, they were talking about her and didn't notice me standing in the doorway. There was a fire burning which gave such a warm orange glow to the room you couldn't tell it needed a coat of paint or that the rug was badly worn by the sofa. Mother was sewing some new curtains for me, and she squinted at the needle as she tried to thread it by firelight. Father was tapping his pipe impatiently on the table.

"Oh, Milton," Mother said quietly to him, "why bother yourself so over her. It's not worth it."

"Sue, it's not so much Aunt Carolyn," he answered. "She's just a lonely old woman now. But George and Doreen, and even Jane." He paused. "God! What parasites! Just waiting for her to die. It's enough to make you sick, Sue." He leaned forward. "I love the old gal for holding them off this long," he said smiling a little. "Real backbone in that woman!"

"Sarah, what are you standing there for?" Mother's voice pulled me into the room, and I mumbled good night and ran upstairs again.

My Uncle George worked off and on as a broker on Wall Street, but I don't believe he was very good at it. Mostly he played cards and billiards around his rooms at the University Club on Fifty-seventh street. Aunt Carolyn paid his bills. He wore gold wire glasses and under his nose was a neatly manicured yellow mustache. He usually invited himself for Thanksgiving dinner--"for plain homecooking," he said--and after each mouthful he carefully wiped his mustache.

Once when he spoke across the table of how he would invest her money, meaning Aunt Carolyn's, if he were doing it, and he rattled off Dun and Bradstreet quotations in a knowing way, Mother started to talk directly to me, and I could tell Father was listening to us.

Suddnely Uncle George was saying, "I'll feel a lot

more secure when she goes." Father put down his fork and gave Uncle George a look that would have frozen the turkey, but Uncle George continued, winking at me. "Yes, siree, I'll be a lot better off...eh, Sarah?"

Before I could nod, Father said, "Pass the potatoes, George, will you?" in a way that shut him up for a few minutes and made Mother swallow something the wrong way and rush into the kitchen.

I really didn't like anyone in Father's family, him excepted, but the one I didn't like the most was my first cousin, Jane, who was only two years older than I but about ten times as smart, and very pretty for her age. She wore white French gloves that buttoned. When Aunt Doreen and Jane came out from the city to visit us each summer--we lived in Westchester County--we children were expected to play together nicely, but Jane was always bloating my Didee Doll till it didn't work anymore, or she would run hide in the attic to make me find her. I hated the attic, for it was dark and dusty and had spiders. If we played outside, she never messed her organdy, but I always looked grass-stained and muddy as if I had been rolling down the hill in back--whether I had or not.

Christmas afternoons we went in to their apartment for dinner. They sprayed their Christmas tree white and decorated it with blue and silver balls or little foreign orna-

ments of every imaginable variety--silver birds, gold candles, painted wooden Santa Clauses from Sweden--and my pleasure in our green tree at home with its colored lights faded beside the elegant decorations at Aunt Doreen's. After Jane showed me all her new presents, she would take me down the hall to her bedroom, which had an extension phone, and fling open her wardrobe to look at all her clothes from Saks and Bests. Then I would inspect her collection of jewelry which overflowed the red box onto her dresser top: bracelets, necklaces, pins, even earrings. I always tried not to appear too impressed, but nevertheless I was always introduced to any school friends present as "Sarah, my country cousin." Her lips turned up a little when she said it. I knew in the back of my mind that Aunt Carolyn paid for the apartment and everything, but Jane and Aunt Doreen conveniently forgot it, as did I when I visited them.

The first year Aunt Carolyn was bedridden, Aunt Doreen and Jane moved farther uptown so that someone in the family was near, just in case, as Aunt Doreen said. I guess they lived so near they dropped in a couple of times a week, and it worried Uncle George quite a lot though there really wasn't much he could do about it except telephone Aunt Carolyn more often and take her green house flowers.

Since I had first heard of Aunt Carolyn's birthday parties, I had wanted to go, too, having a rather specific

picture of games and creamed-chicken-peas-mashed potatoes-ice cream and cake loaded with enough candles for three blows. And maybe presents for the guests. This grand picture I cherished till I was ten, and Father told me I was old enough to come with him the next time. I counted the days after Christmas although I knew Mother disapproved highly of my going at all. The night of the thirteenth she said as much in front of me at the table.

Father shook his head firmly. "No, Sue," he said, "it will be all right. I want Sarah to see the kind of stuff that generation was made of while she still has the chance."

The next day I was driven home early from school, missing Spelling and Art, to get ready for the party. Mother made me take a bath though it was the middle of the day, and she put out my old green velveteen with the lacy white collar, which scratched my mole, and the silk socks which kept falling inside my patent leathers until I had to pull them up because they hurt.

All the way into town I wriggled and twisted in my seat to peer at each tall building, asking if it were Aunt Carolyn's though I knew perfectly well hers had a doorman. After we had followed the river for what seemed hours, Father pulled over to a driveway which ran down to an underground garage. An elevator took us to the eighth floor, and I was beginning to feel so strange in my stomach that I clutched

Father's hand, and in the corridor I stepped only on the gold swirls of the red carpet, for luck. We stopped before a tall white door numbered 802A, and Father knocked lightly. A colored maid dressed in green cotton, the exact same color as my velveteen, and a white ruffled apron, answered the door. She flashed a wide smile of gold and white and pink as if she and Father shared a secret, perhaps something about the party.

"Lettie, this is Sarah," my father said. "Mrs. Sutherland is expecting her, too, this afternoon." He handed her his heavy coat to put on a hanger in the closet.

"Yes, sir." She grinned down at me. "How are you, Miss Sarah?"

After she had helped me out of my tangled sleeves, Father pushed me ahead down the short dark hallway to a softly lighted room at the end. The air was old and musty, the way our attic smelled on a hot day, and for one bad moment, I thought I really was going to throw up.

"Move, Sarah," Father said, prodding me, and I had no choice.

The parlor was all rose, every imaginable shade from the palest pink on the brocaded walls to the deep maroon curtains and the lavender of the silk upholstery on the white and gold Louis XIV chairs. I knew, because Aunt Doreen had one, that they were the chairs with air inside that swooshed when

you sat down and stayed dented after you stood. The walls were covered with little hanging shelves with porcelain shepherds and shepherdesses that looked very expensive, and on the mantle was a large glass vase of long-stemmed white roses with an unopened card tucked in the top. There was no fire in the fireplace, but instead a large piece of dull gold paper folded into a large fan. It seemed that maybe it wasn't going to be much of a party after all.

"Well, Milton, I'm glad you made it another year." A strong voice, hard as ice, came from the chaise lounge against the far wall. There half-lay, half-sat the oldest person I had ever seen, covered mostly by a pale blue silk quilt. She was very thin, and her hair was yellow-white, close against her head. Her hands fluttered restlessly about her neck, and her face was so powdered that she looked more like a porcelain shepherdess than a real woman. I stared, forgetting my manners.

"Your daughter, Milton?" Aunt Carolyn asked sharply.

Father nodded.

"Come here then, Sarah."

In panic I looked over at my father.

"Well...come at once, child."

I went, almost falling over the end of her feet. A light fragrant smell of dried roses that you put in linen closets seemed to come from her, or the quilt. She adjusted a gold-rimmed pince nez, the kind you never see now, to her

right eye and squinting through her left eye so that she looked like an owl, she bade me come closer still. I saw that her pink scalp showed through her thin hair. She wore tiny diamond earrings that sparkled in the light, and on her bedjacket, placed over one of the protruding bones on her neck so that the bones in my neck ached to see it, there was a very large oval green and yellow pin. She caressed it when she saw I was looking.

"Well, thank the good Lord you don't resemble your father," she said. "Now kiss me."

I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and aimed for her forehead. It felt shiny, like brown wrapping paper.

"Well, that's more like it, though the next time it would be better if you swallowed first." Aunt Carolyn raised a lace handkerchief to her forehead. Her hand was covered with brown spots. "You see, I don't bite," she said to me. "Do I, George?"

I was glad I hadn't known before there were the others in the room. Aunt Doreen sat by the window, her plump figure appearing pinched by the delicate armchair. She turned to watch Uncle George, who was perched uneasily on the edge of another armchair. He touched his hand to his mustache as if there might be food in it and clucked his teeth. I followed Father to the sofa.

"Why no, of course you don't bite, Aunt Carolyn."

Uncle George waved his head emphatically.

"Well now," drawled my father, "I wouldn't go so far as to say that."

Aunt Carolyn's eyes narrowed. It was getting to be less and less like a birthday party, and I edged closer to Father on the sofa. Aunt Carolyn turned to Uncle George again. "Is that so, George?"

"Certainly not." He straightened awkwardly against the chair-back. "I mean it is. Of course you don't bite."

"Make up your mind, Uncle George Porgie." A shrill voice sang out, and my cousin Jane in an immaculate white pinafore and black patent leather pumps and white silk stockings up to her knees slid over the top of a chair and stuck out her tongue at Uncle George.

"Jane!" Jane whirled to look at Aunt Carolyn. "A twelve-year-old girl sits quietly like a lady. Now go at once into the pantry, and ask Lettie please to bring the tea cart."

"I was getting hungry," Jane said to me. On her way past Uncle George she hummed "kissed the girls and made them cry" and quickly ducked out of reach of his hand into the hallway.

Uncle George's face flushed. "That child needs someone to give her a good spanking," he said, choking and blowing his nose very hard. "I've never heard such rude-

ness." He almost looked as if he might cry, something I had never seen a grown-up do, and I watched eagerly.

Aunt Doreen stood up and walked over to the sofa beside me. From the shelf over my head she lifted a green and white figurine and began to wipe it with her handkerchief. "Aunt Carolyn, which is this one?" she asked, examining the bottom of the figure's stand, her thick lips opened slightly. "I can't quite make the hallmark out."

"They're all Dresden, Doreen. Now please don't fuss with them anymore. Lettie dusts them regularly."

Uncle George cleared his throat and folded his handkerchief neatly back into his pocket. He brushed a piece of fuzz off his coat with a flourish. "Just let me tell you all one thing," he said, stretching his feet far into the room. "It's not much longer I have to take this." He paused dramatically, aware we were listening. "Not much longer," he repeated. "That girl's going to a school so far away from New York she'll be home only in summer. And she'll go to a place that can teach her a thing or two about manners." His face grew ever more crimson.

"And when is this, may I ask, George?" Aunt Doreen asked sarcastically.

"When I'm handling the estate, Doreen. That's when."

There was a dead silence as we all stared at Uncle George. Father spoke first and in a tone that seemed to me then angrier than necessary.

"I hardly think that remark was called for, George," he said.

All at once Aunt Carolyn rapped her fingers on the table beside her, and I jumped. "That's enough-all of you," she said. Her voice was brittle and sharp. "This is my birthday."

Father reached for his pipe and nonchalantly pressed some tobacco down with his thumb. He winked across the room at Aunt Carolyn, and a flicker of amusement brushed across her face.

"Now hush, all of you," she said again.

We heard the tea cart from down the hall, Lettie pushing it and Jane giving directions all the way. Aunt Doreen walked over to help Aunt Carolyn pour the tea despite the old lady's expression of irritation, and Lettie pushed the cart between them. There was pound cake and toast with butter and marmalade, which Father told me to pass around. As Aunt Carolyn drank, her hand shook so it made even me worry she might drop her cup. When she coughed, her cup rattled in its saucer, and Aunt Doreen reached over to take it from her. Aunt Carolyn said in a withering voice, "Sit down, will you, Doreen? I believe I'm still quite capable of drinking my tea unattended." She took a few more swallows and then firmly laid her cup on the table beside her.

Aunt Carolyn controlled the conversation from then on,

discussing the foreign news or old family history while Uncle George and Aunt Doreen nodded and smiled like Cheshire cats, each trying to outdo the other in agreeing with her. When the wind rattled the French window behind the curtains, Uncle George jumped up first to tighten the handles; and when Aunt Doreen saw Aunt Carolyn set her plate on the cart, she whisked ours up and pushed the cart to the door though we all knew perfectly well that was what she had Lettie for. If Uncle George liked something, and Aunt Carolyn agreed, Aunt Doreen simply adored it. It went on like this for over an hour. I ate lots of cake and admired Jane's dress and jewelry from a distance, and my father said nothing, but his face became more and more grim.

He suddenly rose. "We must go home," he said abruptly. "Come, Sarah," and despite Aunt Doreen's cry, we went to Aunt Carolyn's chaise lounge. I heard him whisper to her, for I was right behind. "You can manage them another year, can't you?" and he put his rough hand lightly on her emaciated shoulder and patted it.

She opened and shut her wrinkled mouth like a hungry sparrow, and her eyes filled suddenly, but she brushed away the tears so fast with her handkerchief they never touched her powdered cheeks.

"Good-bye, Milton," she said, rubbing the jeweled pin on her neck with the side of her hand. The pin was as big as a peanut.

When it came my turn, I kept my eyes open that time as I kissed her to get a better look. The pin had gold all around in a lacy design, and I decided that it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, and that if I wore it, it would make me the most envied member of the family.

"I like that," I said and leaned closer. It glittered and sparkled in the light.

My aunt covered the pin with one thing hand, and her two heavy gold and diamond rings slid up to her knuckle. With the other hand she raised my chin so I had to look straight into her eyes. "I might just leave you this," she said.

I didn't understand what she meant about "leaving," but I got the idea at once. "Oh, would you?" I cried in delight. "I want it very much."

"And I might just not," she said and clamped her mouth tightly shut.

I straightened up, disappointed. Jane was glaring at me from her chair. "She's going to leave that to me," she said with authority.

Aunt Carolyn raised her pince-nez again and peered at Jane.

"She is not!" I burst out heatedly, ignoring Father's snapping fingers. "Just wait and see," I added.

Jane smiled cryptically and yawned, placing her hand delicately over her mouth the way I had seen Aunt Doreen do.

She lifted her dress and let it float down lightly to her knees as I stared, frowning, unable to answer.

"Sarah," Father's voice was stern. "Come here at once."

Reluctantly I joined him in the hall. He hand tightened on my shoulder, and we were putting on our coats before I could twist away.

"I sure wish we saw more of you folks," Lettie said as she opened the door for us.

"Oh, we'll be back next year, don't worry," Father answered somewhat gruffly. Then he told her how good the cake was.

Going home he made me keep still until we were well out of the traffic. The Parkway was jammed with commuter cars for Rye and Greenwich, and a light drizzle was falling. Whether it was the traffic or the weather or the so-called birthday party or me or what, I didn't know, but Father's expression grew fiercer with every car he passed. I knew enough to keep still and contented myself with deciding where I would keep the brooch. I'd found a secret drawer inside the secretary downstairs one rainy afternoon. You pulled out a panel which looked like part of the decoration, and in the little drawer I kept colored stones and extra candy. I planned to hide the brooch there, too. Father finally reached for his pipe and, holding the wheel

carefully with his left hand, lit it.

"It's a nice pin, isn't it, Father?" I asked.

Father grunted. "It's not yours," he said. "Besides, your Uncle Robert gave it to her before he died, and it's her favorite. It means a great deal to her, Sarah."

"But why don't you want me to have it? She said I could, didn't she? Didn't she? And I really want it," I couldn't believe Father would deny me if Aunt Carolyn said it was all right. "Jane told me she gets lots of jewelry from Aunt Carolyn," I added.

Father drew the pipe from his mouth. "I'm sure she does," he practically yelled. "I want, I want. Sarah, haven't you enough to keep you happy?"

"Well," I said thoughtfully, "Jane has lots of pins and bracelets, and she wears Aunt Doreen's pearls, too."

"For heavens' sake, Sarah, once and for all you're not..." I only halfway listened to a familiar scolding on the difference between Jane and myself. Father finished with, "And you're not going to parade around with a valuable brooch on."

I drew myself up. "I wasn't going to parade around," I said with dignity. "I'd wear it only on special occasions."

My father smiled slightly. "Like what?" he countered.

"Oh," I squirmed in the seat, "well...like at the movies or something. Or to a party. Aunt Carolyn's birthday parties," I added triumphantly. "That's when I'll wear

it."

Father loosed the wheel for an instant and turned to stare at me. The car swerved over the center line, and he barely brought it back before another car came around the curve from the opposite directions. "Good God, Sarah!" he exclaimed. "What on earth do you mean? Don't you realize that if you have the pin left you--and I'm not saying you will--but if you do, your Aunt Carolyn will be dead?"

"Oh, I answered, staring at my clean fingernails. "You mean like Ginger?" Our Siamese had been run over by the milkman, and Mrs. Simmons from next door had found her in the driveway.

"Yes. That's exactly the idea. D-E-A-D," he spelled out.

"I really like our new cat lots better than Ginger, Father. He doesn't scratch so much." I wound a curl of hair tightly about my little finger and let it spring.

Father pulled his pipe away from his mouth and laid it on the seat beside him, and I knew I was in for another lecture. Slowly and quietly he began. "With people, Sarah," he said, "its different. People..."

I opened and shut the ashtray absently, and he stopped talking. "Oh, Father," I ducked my head underneath his right arm and peered up into his frowning face. "Couldn't I please have that pin?" I smiled my most persuasive smile. "Please, don't say no."

"It's entirely up to your Aunt Carolyn," he answered sternly and sighed deeply as he did when he gave up arguing with Mother, and from then on he concentrated on the driving.

"Well, what about the money?" I asked. "Couldn't we get some of that? Enough for a new bike? Jane says she has lots of money from Aunt Carolyn." I had been keeping my fingers crossed that I would get an English bicycle with gears for Christmas, and I felt sure that Aunt Carolyn would die before then. She looked so old. Father didn't answer. "Father?"

"No," he growled. "Not one cent. Not one! Now forget it. We agreed on that, your Aunt and I, many years before you were born, and it's all settled." He was turning into our gravel driveway. He eased the car into our garage and turned off the ignition. "Now, hurry on in and wash up. Your mother probably has supper on the table."

And that was that. When Father didn't want to talk about something all heaven and earth and even my mother couldn't make him.

Seeing Aunt Carolyn's apartment with its Dresden figurines and French furniture made me even more critical of the modesty, as I considered it, of our home during the next year. When Aunt Doreen and Jane came out that summer, I encouraged Jane to tell me about her school and her piano and ballet lessons. Without much urging she performed a

ballet in the playroom to the tune of Alexander's Ragtime Band. It was beautiful, and the square dancing offered by the Westchester County Grade School seemed clumsy and awkward in comparison. By the fall of that year I knew the bicycle was out as Aunt Carolyn was still quite alive. Any mention of the brooch was received in cold silence by Father, who said it was about time I forgot about it, and that I was becoming as bad as Aunt Doreen and Uncle George.

When Aunt Carolyn's birthday arrived the following January. I begged to go, but Mother said she thought I was coming down with something and should be in bed. It turned out later to be the measles, but no spots had appeared as yet, and I felt miserable and blistering hot all over. Father came to the doorway before he left.

"Goodbuy, Snooks," he said. "Take care of your mother while I'm gone." He blew me a kiss. "What shall I tell Aunt Carolyn for you?"

"Just tell her I'm very sick and going to die," I moaned. "No...wait." I thought carefully. "Please, would you just see to make positively sure she still has that emerald pin and hasn't given it to Jane or somebody?" I had found out the green stone was an emerald after looking up "Gems" in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Father frowned and turned abruptly to leave.

"Oh, wait, please, Father," I begged. "I'm sorry. Will you please give her my love and tell her I miss her just

terribly."

In four steps my father was beside my bed. He placed his cool hand hard against my forehead and pressed it into the pillow. "Now look, Sarah, are you sure you mean that?" His voice was harsh.

"Well, of course."

Without another word he left the bedroom. When the car turned out the driveway, my mother came back upstairs. "You didn't want your father to catch flu or whatever it is, did you?"

"I don't care," I sobbed face down into the hot pillow. "It isn't fair to hate me so when all I want is that old brooch."

Of course I didn't want Aunt Carolyn to have to die, but I did want that pin, and the more I sobbed the more sorry I felt for myself and the hotter I became, so that after Mother took my four o'clock temperature, she whistled softly to herself and brought me the icepack. Then she called Dr. Green.

Ten days later I was allowed downstairs again. The spots were fading. After dinner Father asked me to come in while they drank their coffee. The fire was burning in the grate, and nothing appeared unusual although I sensed that something might happen any minute. Mother was mending, and Father sipping his coffee.

"Here," he said when I approached the chair. He picked

up from the table a dark blue leatherbox and handed it to me, not smiling at all. "Here, when Aunt Carolyn heard you were sick, she asked me to give this to you."

I took the box from him and snapped open the lid. There on the deep purple velvet lay the emerald pin. It was even more exquisite than I remembered. I stared incredulously at it and looked back at Father, waiting for him to speak.

"She said you could have it now. And Sarah, she said you were to know it was her favorite pin. You must take special care of it, she said. Never lose it or give it away." His voice was low and choked, and it kept me from feeling excited or happy. It was almost as if I were being punished. I looked at Mother, but her eyes were on her sewing.

Without glancing up, she said, "You'd better go upstairs now, Sarah."

Slowly I walked from the room, clutching the box tightly, hardly able to realize what I was holding. Upstairs in my room I turned on the bedside light and examined the pin carefully. The stone was flawless, a deep green which caught the light and flashed blurred reflections across the room on the wallpaper. The setting was of delicate gold filigree, and it was far prettier than any of Jane's or Aunt Doreen's jewelry. I pictured myself the center of attention at the next Christmas dinner, my brooch displayed prominently on the green velvet dress, and everyone respectful. They

would never call me "Jane's country cousin" now, I was sure of that! The ringing of the phone downstairs interrupted my fantasy.

Father caught it in the middle of the third ring, and through the register I could hear his deep rumbling voice, though I could not catch what he said. I felt sure something terrible had happened; so I slipped on my bathrobe and crept down the stairs to the landing. I sat on the bottom step listening in the dark, out of sight. Father was talking to Aunt Carolyn's doctor. He said he would be in at eight in the morning and would meet him at the apartment to make the arrangements. He hung up.

Aunt Carolyn was dead. All at once I felt as if I had killed her. Didn't I have the brooch? I wanted to run down frantically into the living room and tell them I was terribly sorry.

"Well, she's gone," Father said, his voice sounding as if it were many rooms away. "They all beat her at last."

I heard my mother rise from her chair. "Oh, Milt, she was an old woman. And mean, too. You've said so yourself. It's better."

He didn't answer for a minute, and then I could hardly hear. "Old," he said, "but not so mean anymore. Just tired and so lonely." He drew a deep breath. "How could they have, damn them!" he suddenly thundered. "And our Sarah helped, of course."

I didn't want to hear anymore. I turned upstairs and stumbled and scraped my arm against the railing as I caught myself. They must have heard me, for the talking stopped. In my room I closed the door and flung myself onto the end of the bed and dug my teeth into the quilt, biting the wet softness to keep from crying. I went over everything I could remember having said to Aunt Carolyn, and when I ran out of that, I remembered all the things I had thought, and I knew I was worse than Aunt Doreen, or Uncle George, or even Jane.

I lay there for a long time without moving. Then I slowly walked across to my bureau, opened the blue leather case and gazed at the brooch. I opened and closed the catch and rubbed the stone until it shone in the streetlight coming through the window. I laid it back in its soft velvet bed. My parents started up the stairs, and I saw the streak of the hall light shine through the crack of my door. They didn't come in. Before their door closed, I was far under my covers shivering. In the morning I told them I wanted to go with Father into New York.

When Lettie opened the door of Aunt Carolyn's apartment, she wasn't smiling, and when she didn't help me with my coat, I figured she knew about me, too. Father asked if she had phoned the others, but she said, "Oh no, sir. Just the Doctor and you. Like she told me last night before she went to sleep. Like she knew."

Father nodded, and I followed him down the hall into the living room. Dr. Murphey seemed surprised to see me and shook hands solemnly with us both before he and Father moved over to the window to talk. I slipped out unnoticed and moved silently down the corridor to the back of the apartment.

I knocked on Aunt Carolyn's bedroom door before I realised with horror she couldn't hear. Softly I turned the knob and pushed, praying they would start looking for me right away. A bed light on the table threw the bedposts into tall thin shadows on the opposite wall and the room smelled like her, the soft, bitter-sweet smell of dried roses. Knowing where she was, I kept my eyes on the rug and walked slowly until my knees touched the side of the big double bed. I closed my eyes and counted slowly to ten. I opened them and raised my head. She was turned slightly toward the door as if she had heard me knock, but her eyes were shut.

It took only a second to pin the brooch to her robe though I had to keep wiping my eyes with the back of my hand to see well enough. I didn't hear the door open, and I didn't know my father was there until he said quietly, "Come, Sarah, you have seen enough for one morning."

He took me gently by the hand and we walked away together.

III

BOX OF RUMMAGE

Mrs. Sooner slipped through the revolving glass door of the FBI entrance of the Department of Justice and waited patiently while the guard checked her identification card. It was the hollow-cheeked picture they'd taken twenty-two years ago after Bill had gone and she'd lost the baby, before they gave her a job, and it should be replaced. Last year she had crossed out "brown" for her hair, and typed in "grey" and let it go at that. The weight, 115 pounds, she had left the same though she had dropped, but she didn't think they looked that carefully at her. As she tucked the card away, the guard said it was going to be a scorcher, and she said yes it was, but he didn't hear her because he'd spoken to the girl behind her. She stepped into the first elevator at 7:50, not looking at anybody.

Mrs. Sooner was never late, and she had never been absent except for that one time with influenza when the doctor had ordered her to bed. Gwendolyn, her landlady and only friend, had picked up the prescriptions, fed her broths and custard, and even changed her linen so that she'd be up again, fit as a fiddle, in seven days. Gwendolyn ran the little apartment house with a brusqueness which frightened

off most young people, but underneath she had the warmest heart, and Mrs. Sooner had grown to depend on Gwendolyn, on her judgment and common sense especially. And she liked to think that in her own way Gwendolyn needed her.

They ate supper together in the evenings, and when Mrs. Sooner came home from work, she went right downstairs to Gwendolyn's apartment after she took her corset off, if it was Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. The other days, including Sunday dinner, Gwendolyn came upstairs to her apartment. After supper if it was balmy enough, they would go outside on the porch to talk about the new tenants or Mrs. Sooner's job in Personnel or whatever came to mind. It was almost like family.

Mrs. Sooner had been with Personnel for fifteen years, and she knew that if they continued to approve of her work, she could count on a O-S-S rating in December. The work was exacting, but she liked it, and in her quiet way over the years she had established the reputation for her office of outstanding efficiency and accuracy. The eight typists worked on Form 57s which were passed to her for checking before she gave them to Mr. Frazier. Then they were turned over to administration. With her girls she insisted on no erasures, and there were none. She had other regulations, too, which applied to married women, and which kept things running quite smoothly.

As usual she was the first in the office that morning.

She glanced with approval down the two straight rows of typing desks, to the long glassed-off area for Mr. Frazier at the end of the room. Everything was neat and tidy: papers put away, chairs close under the desks, covers on the typewriters. Across the office, lined evenly against the long wall stood the grey steel filing cabinets which were the key depository for all FBI employment records in the entire country. They were locked up each night and accessible in the daytime only to those approved by Mrs. Sooner. Her job carried a lot of responsibility.

She settled down into her desk and pulled out a bulging file most people would have groaned at. She had just started on the top form when she heard footsteps coming closer down the hall, and the door opened.

It was Dorothy Stickle, who had married last fall. She stood there in the doorway a minute, looking about the office to make sure they were alone and brushing her straight blond hair away from her face. Her eyes were red as if she'd been crying.

"Whatever is the matter, Dorothy?" Mrs. Sooner asked.

The girl shook her head mutely, too upset to answer, and she rolled a string of used Kleenex in one hand.

"What's wrong?" Mrs. Sooner asked again as Dorothy began to walk slowly over to Mrs. Sooner's desk, her eyes downcast. The lipstick at the corners of her mouth was smeared unevenly.

"Oh, Ma'm," Dorothy answered, her normally loud voice low, "I came early because I wanted to speak to you."

For a second Mrs. Sooner thought Dorothy was making fun of her talking that way, for Dorothy ate lunch with Edna and June and imitated their manner. But she was speaking so earnestly and helplessly pressing the Kleenex to her eyes.

"And now Herb is just furious," she said, "And he's not going to be able to go back to school when he gets out of the Service if I have to quit work now." The tears poured down her cheek. "Oh, Mrs. Sooner, I'm going to have a baby," she sobbed out.

Mrs. Sooner stared at Dorothy in amazement. In December she had questioned the girl very carefully on this very matter before recommending her for the semi-annual raise, and Dorothy had sworn up and down they were going to wait for their family until after Herb was out of school.

Dorothy dug in her bag for a fresh tissue. "And I wanted to ask you what to do. "Oh," she began to sob again, "I'm so miserable."

It was as if by crying about it she expected Mrs. Sooner to fix everything, but long ago she had realized it was impossible to run an efficient office with expectant mothers, and she had made a rule to dismiss them as soon as she knew. They lost interest in the work and were sick a lot. But most of all it upset her, remembering Billy.

"Dorothy," she said sternly, "you know the regulations here."

"Oh yes, Ma'm, I do." She smiled so forlornly that Mrs. Sooner felt a lump grow in her throat. "I've just got to work though," Dorothy went on, "and I told Herb I'd even bring my lunch to the office."

Mrs. Sooner jerked her chin up sharply, and Dorothy's eyes narrowed.

"We...we..." Dorothy went on hesitantly, "we could eat together, couldn't we?"

It was too good to believe, and the girl had suggested it herself as if she really wanted to. Quite suddenly, hardly thinking of the consequences, Mrs. Sooner changed her mind: She would make an exception for Dorothy. She could hardly keep the eagerness out of her voice as she told Dorothy she could stay three more months, till September.

"Oh, thank you, Ma'm, thank you," Dorothy said, and then she broke down entirely, leaning on the desk and sobbing. "I wish I'd never married," she said. "Oh, I hate being this way." She buried her wet face into her hands, and her shoulders shook.

Mrs. Sooner came quickly around her desk and put her arms about the girl's quivering shoulders. "It's all right, Dorothy," she said, "Everything will be all right. You can stay, dear." She added hesitantly, "And we'll have a nice time together, won't we?"

But Dorothy was so upset she couldn't answer.

The elevator door clanged then, and they heard heels clicking sharper and closer on the hard tile floor outside the door. Mrs. Sooner walked quickly around her desk again, and Dorothy whipped out her compact and brushed her nose with powder. When she turned she hardly looked as if she'd been crying, and she gave Mrs. Sooner a brave smile as she walked down the aisle to her desk by the window.

Edna, a tall, straight-backed young woman with short, curly red hair burst through the door first, announcing in her melodramatic way, "Well, back to the salt mines." She swung past Mrs. Sooner's desk, her narrow hips barely missing it.

Mrs. Sooner frowned slightly, not knowing exactly why except that the woman always seemed so--she couldn't put her finger on it--insincere maybe, and she carried a great influence with the girls in the office.

"Good morning, Mrs. Sooner," said the brunette following Edna. Her sallow skin was emphasized by the orange blouse, and her cotton gloves were grey. She wiggled her hips rhythmically in time to Edna's. Gwendolyn said it was a disgrace to keep her on.

"Good morning, June," Mrs. Sooner answered to the girl's back. "Oh, June, I wonder if..."

June paused and looked over her shoulder as if she resented being asked to lift a finger.

"Would you please take the filing today?"

"Sure," she said casually, "Sure." She made a face she thought Mrs. Sooner couldn't see and walked on across the office to her desk.

"Hi, Kid," Edna called to Dorothy, and for some unexplainable reason she and June began to giggle uncontrollably.

Dorothy covered her eyes, and she became so upset she had to leave the room, her hands pressed over her face, not even looking at Mrs. Sooner. It was a shame. The typewriters began tapping, and Mrs. Sooner looked down at her work again with relief. She would ask Gwendolyn what she thought about it that evening.

If the truth were known, Mrs. Sooner was a little afraid of Gwendolyn Roberts. Well, not afraid, really, but Gwendolyn was such a firm person that generally if they disagreed, Mrs. Sooner preferred to remain silent rather than argue the point. If crossed, Gwendolyn could go for several days at a time hardly speaking to her. They would eat together as usual, but it wasn't the same, and when it grew unbearable, Mrs. Sooner, feeling somehow she was to blame, would pick up a special pie or pastry from Magruder's downtown, and she would bring it home after work, setting it at Gwendolyn's place. Gwendolyn would accept it graciously like a wise priestess and smile her thanks, and everything would be serene as before.

Gwendolyn loved especially to eat. She could eat plum

pudding on top of a whole roast pork dinner, and afterwards even nibble on the cookies or whatever she'd baked that day. Her tiny frame was immersed in so much fat that when she sat down in one of the rockers, her skirt rose almost above her knees, and in the very hot weather she perspired heavily. But Gwendolyn was always neat and clean, and never was her iron gray hair out of place. She pressed her house smocks, and never wore stockings with wide runs as very heavy women are apt to. It was as if she expected company all the time though no one ever came.

She had no family left since Laurie, her only daughter, had run off with a Marine who had worked and worked on her to come with him until she didn't know her own mind and wouldn't listen to anyone else. It had been a terrible shock to Gwendolyn, and it was as if she still could not quite believe it. Every morning she timed the postman from the corner at Kaloroma Road to their front steps, and she rushed out to meet him as if this time there was for sure a letter.

Mrs. Sooner often thought that if Gwendolyn had an outside job, too, maybe only part time, she would be happier and her loneliness would ease. She knew all about that because in 1920 her own husband, Bill, had gone away one day--just left, only a few months after they were married. He had said it was a trip to New York and that he would be

Tuesday evening, and he had packed the large suitcase with all his winter clothes and even taken his galoshes, though it was a clear day. At the door he had kissed her lightly on the cheek. "See you soon," he had said over his shoulder, but she never saw him again. She had become crazy and sick with worry that he had been hurt in an accident until she realized the truth.

Right afterwards she had discovered there was to be a child. Theirs. And she lived for the child's birth, refusing the martyr's role some might have assumed. Unable to find a job while she was pregnant, she had applied at the Women's Exchange for mending at home and rented a little portable sewing machine. To stop any gossip she had told the neighbors Bill had gone on business, and she had not been able to travel. She lied in her letters home.

That summer she nearly ruined her eyes to save on the electricity while she sewed and knit for the baby after she had folded away the mending. She made pictures in her mind of the little house and garden they would have, and she believed he would be strong and happy with her love instead of many toys. She knew it would be a boy; so she made the baby clothes mostly in blue and white: a little blue sweater with white rabbits about the border, a blue coat with white tassles and made of the warmest wool she could find. She even knit a pair of the long stockings that children wore in those days, and she pieced a quilt from the material in

two of her own dresses, blue and grey. From scraps of white lace and some silk she bought, she sewed a white dress so long it fell below her knees when she cradled him at the Baptismal font.

When Billy died two months after he was born, she took the clothes from his drawer and folding them gently in tissue paper and a box, put them away with her tears in the bottom of her trunk. The next week she applied for the opening at the FBI typists' pool, and after her first paycheck she moved across town to Gwendolyn's building on Columbia Road. One rainy evening after the influenza epidemic, Mrs. Sooner had brought out the box of clothes and told Gwendolyn the story briefly. After Gwendolyn had touched each garment gently and unbuttoned and buttoned the blue rabbit sweater, as she called it, and smoothed out the wrinkled collar of the christening dress, she had looked up at Mrs. Sooner, and with her voice choked, said, "They are really beautiful, Mabel. Promise you will keep them always?" And Mrs. Sooner, her eyes filling at the other's uncharacteristic tenderness said, "Of course, they are all I have left of him." She had put the clothes away quickly, and they didn't talk about it again.

The night after Dorothy spoke to her, Mrs. Sooner waited to tell Gwendolyn the incident until they were out on the front porch enjoying the cool soft breeze which their

chairs stirred and watching the streetcars which ran right past the apartment building and pulled to a stop down a hundred yards. The cars swayed as they let passengers on and off, and then with bells clanging they raced on. About 8:30 the drivers switched on their overhead lights, and the two women watched fascinated as these little worlds rushed by.

"They all seem to be going somewhere, don't they, Mabel?" Gwendolyn said, rocking heavily in her chair.

Mrs. Sooner didn't answer but pulled her thin sweater closer over her shoulders. "Gwendolyn," she said, taking off her glasses and wiping them as she spoke, "the most wonderful thing happened today at work. You'll never guess."

"What?" asked Gwendolyn. Her eyes brightened. "Was old Frazier transferred?"

"No." Mrs. Sooner giggled, for they had an old joke about Mr. Frazier. "But you remember Dorothy Stickle, don't you?"

Gwendolyn's voice sharpened. "You mean the one you said you have to watch so carefully?"

"Well, yes," Mrs. Sooner admitted. "But I was quite wrong about her, Gwendolyn. Dorothy's really a sweet girl." She remembered Dorothy's soft, helpless eyes.

Gwendolyn sniffed. She was the kind of person who prided herself on being convinced only be facts and figures, and not being at all sentimental.

"But she's in trouble, Gwendolyn. She's having a baby, and, well, she broke down in the office this morning and told me all about it. They can't afford a baby and..."

"Well," interrupted Gwendolyn angrily, "I don't see what's so wonderful about that! You fired her, didn't you?"

Mrs. Sooner stopped rocking and stared at her friend. "No, how could I have, Gwendolyn? I told her she could stay till September."

"Really, Mabel," Gwendolyn said in her firm way. "I don't understand a rule if you break it. Besides, when she married last year she certainly knew what she was getting into."

Mrs. Sooner ignored her. "And do you know what? She's going to bring her lunch now, and we'll eat together every-day. She suggested it, Gwendolyn. It wasn't my idea." Mrs. Sooner couldn't keep the excitement from her voice. All the years she had worked at the FBI this was the first time anyone had made a real effort to become friendly.

"I think you're a fool, Mabel Sooner," Gwendolyn said fiercely, emphasizing each syllable. "An utter fool. The little hussy!" She whirled her chair sideways to face Mrs. Sooner. "Are you blind?"

Mrs. Sooner stopped rocking again and stared at her friend's face which was white and glistening with perspiration in the street light.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Can't you see she's just wormed her way around you so that you'll keep her on? Can't you see that?" Gwendolyn broke into a strange, almost hysterical laugh, and her whole body shook. "It's a trick, can't you see?" she cried hoarsely. "And you believed her."

"Why, Gwendolyn, I can't imagine why you say that," Mrs. Sooner said slowly. She had never before directly contradicted her friend, and now she had begun she found it intoxicating. "She's a sweet girl, lonely, and in trouble... and she thinks I can help her." Her voice became firm and sure. "And I will."

Gwendolyn rocked in heavy silence as several street-cars passed. She was frowning and her mouth was set. Finally she stopped and said pitifully. "I should know. I couldn't even trust my Laurie to be honest with me." Her voice was strained and high. "You'll be sorry, Mabel. You'll be very sorry."

Mrs. Sooner slipped forward to the edge of the chair, her thin fingers curling about the arms for support. She spoke positively. "You're wrong, Gwendolyn, and I know you're making this up. That's what I think!" She waited for Gwendolyn to answer, eager to contradict her again.

But Gwendolyn put her face into her hands which were pink and clean like a baby's, and she shook her head silently.

Mrs. Sooner triumphantly pushed her advantage. "I won't have you speak that way about Dorothy from now one, do you hear me, Gwendolyn Roberts?"

She could have bitten her tongue off as soon as she said it, for Gwendolyn dropped her pink hands to her lap and lifted a face twisted in an anguished smile. One large tear rolled slowly down her cheek and joined another on her chin to fall onto her crepe blouse. Without a word she lifted herself heavily out of the rocker and turned into the house, closing the screen door gently behind her. Mrs. Sooner heard her go into her kitchen in the back of the apartment and open the refrigerator door. She paused hesitantly on the porch, sick at the whole business, and then she marched up to her apartment.

Every evening for the rest of the summer they rocked together on the porch, out of habit, but said little to each other. Gwendolyn's bitterness did not soften, and Mrs. Sooner decided to move from the apartment when the weather became cooler, realising very well now that Gwendolyn demanded complete loyalty from her and would not accept her affection for Dorothy no matter what the circumstances.

In contrast to the long silent evenings, her lunch periods with Dorothy, a bubbling stream of gossip, were a pleasure. Dorothy may have chattered and giggled somewhat too freely, but Mrs. Sooner welcomed her high spirits and

basked in the knowledge that Dorothy had chosen her first for comfort and advice and even preferred her company during this difficult period instead of Edna's or any of the other's.

But even so, it wasn't as if her new friend quite made up for the shattering break with Gwendolyn, and there seemed, too, to be something strange going on all summer at the office. She couldn't have said exactly what is was, and she missed being able to tell Gwendolyn what she thought. It was almost as if there were a secret, almost a conspiracy everyone else knew about but her. One day she walked into the rest room to find Edna and June whispering there together with Dorothy. They stopped as soon as they saw her and exchanged quick looks with each other, warning looks. Then they burst out laughing. It troubled her a little because Dorothy had agreed so emphatically one day at lunch that June and Edna were noisy and almost hypocritical, but Mrs. Sooner never mentioned the incident to Dorothy and tried to forget about it rather than take a chance on the girl becoming angry or on the defensive. She was leaving so soon anyway that it seemed a shame to spoil everything.

There was a custom in Personnel to give girls leaving the office, those who'd been in the Bureau two years or more, a going away party. It was a shower if they were leaving to be married or to have a baby, and in the stockroom of the office was a faded blue clothesbasket for the gifts. Dorothy

had said she would leave before Labor Day weekend, and the girls planned her party, Friday, September third.

Ever since their original talk, Mrs. Sooner had puzzled over what to give Dorothy. Usually she just went over to Lansberg's across the street and picked up boots or a comb and brush set, but with Dorothy it was different. She wanted something special, something that would show how much their friendship had meant to her.

And so the night before the party, after she and Gwendolyn had eaten in silence, and Gwendolyn had gone on downstairs to rock by herself on the porch, Mrs. Sooner went into the bedroom, pulled down the shade, for the sun had dropped behind the next building, and turned on the overhead light. Her hands shook so she could hardly unlock the trunk which stood at the foot of her metal bedstead. She had to drag it forward to open the lid without chipping the bed. The trunk scraped on the floor, and she supposed Gwendolyn had heard, but it didn't seem to matter any more about Gwendolyn. Mrs. Sooner knew she would move out the next month.

The box was at the very bottom, and when she finally pulled it out from under her winter coat and suits, she was puffing, and she stopped to rub her elbow where she had banged it against the side of the trunk. Wrinkling her nose at the faint mildew smell, she removed the box lid, pulled apart the tissues, and gently lifted the tiny garments. Her

fingers trembled as she spread them on the bed, and she wiped at her eyes once or twice, thinking she would have to freshen them before she gave them away, or Dorothy would think they were worn, although they had hardly been used.

The christening dress had turned to light yellow, and the blue wool sweater was crushed lifelessly. Soap and water would help, she thought, humming softly to herself. Though Mrs. Sooner knew children didn't usually wear those long stockings anymore, she decided to wash them, too. It wouldn't hurt to add them, for they were warm. She patted the clothes and carried them into the kitchen to set them in the basin.

It took Mrs. Sooner until after midnight to wash and iron the baby clothes, and as she worked, she half-dreamed that Billy would wake soon and cry for her to nurse him, and, as mothers will, she listened for the rustle of covers in the bedroom. When she finished, she laid the clothes neatly on the bed, filling the collars with tissue and folding the arms under. The back of her throat ached as she repacked the box, and she scolded herself for that: "That's the trouble with Gwendolyn, isn't it?" she asked herself aloud. "Hang onto the past, and you'll end up like Gwendolyn. You'll run out to the mailman every morning. You'll rock half the night away on the porch, closed in by your bitterness, and you'll come to envy the smiles of all the street-

car passengers." She grew happier, and by the time she had wrapped the box in gift paper, her heart beat quickly at the thought of how excited this would make Dorothy, how surprised she would be.

The next morning Mrs. Sooner left early so that Gwendolyn would not meet her in the downstairs hall. It was a grey muggy day, and the pavement sounded wet underneath the car wheels. The streetcars were held up, and when she finally climbed on one, it started up so suddenly she was flung against a support and almost dropped the package.

All morning at work she found herself staring out of the window. The rain was coming now in a steady downpour, and drops of water ran down the panes merging at the bottom and falling away out of sight altogether. She was hurt when Dorothy said she had promised to eat with the others her last day, but she decided not to say anything to show how she felt. When she was alone during the noon hour, she lifted the other packages out of the clothes basket, which Chuck, the office boy, had placed earlier between the files and the window, and carefully laid her present at the bottom so it would be the last one opened.

Right at three Chuck came around for orders on the Cokes and orange drinks, and when he returned from the store at three-thirty he balanced a wire basket of drinks in one hand and the cake carton, wet from the rain, on the palm of

the other in a smart-alecky way. The typewriters stopped abruptly, and Edna cheered him across the room. Jean flung shut her file drawer and was the first to draw her chair over to the window. Mrs. Sooner joined them when she had finished the form in her machine. Chuck went after Mr. Frasier, who rushed out of his office like a primadonna, and while they chattered, he counted heads.

"Everyone's here," Mrs. Sooner said impatiently, looking up at him from her seat. She wished he would get on with the speech. He was such a pompous man, but it surprised her how much she disliked him today.

"Well," he said finally, looking around at all of them as if he thought he were the Director himself, "since we're here, let's begin." He took a bite of cake, and Mrs. Sooner knew the next remark would be about that. "This is good!" he said. "Did you bake it Kathy?" He must have known it came from Taylor's bakerette, for it always did, and the carton was lying right there on the floor. "I feel rather outnumbered with so many pretty women around. Don't mind, of course." He winked at Chuck, who winked back. "And since it seems this drink is for the toast, well," he motioned them to rise from their chairs, "I shall propose a toast. For Dorothy...excuse me...Mrs. Stickle."

Everybody took another swallow of the sweet drinks, and Dorothy moved heavily forward with her shoulders pressed back for balance, as Gwendolyn walked sometimes when she was

very tired. They clapped gaily, and Mr. Frazier blew his nose and wiped his hands off. Stuffing away his wrinkled handkerchief, he continued, "Suppose now you start, Dorothy."

Mrs. Sooner nodded emphatically in agreement and watched intently.

Dorothy stared at the mountain of presents in the clothes basket, her doll-like face flushed. "All for me?" she asked and laughed lightly.

"Go ahead, do something!" Edna said in her strident voice. "Pass the cake, will you?" she called to June, who was slicing a piece.

Everyone watched when Dorothy began to open the top package: a set of polka dot diapers. Her eyes glittered as she reached for the next one, and Mrs. Sooner waited more anxiously than any of them while Dorothy ripped off the papers and thanked everyone quickly, digging through the basket. Before long the floor was covered with paper and ribbons and cards and cake crumbs. Mrs. Sooner tried once to catch Dorothy's eye to smile at her. The others were talking louder and louder, commenting on each gift as it was passed around, and Frazier was looking restless as if he wanted to leave. Chuck, who welcomed any opportunity to waste time, was imitating the cries of admiration from the women to draw attention to himself. Mrs. Sooner smiled quietly to herself as she thought of Dorothy's pleasure, and

she barely heard Dorothy's remark to Edna.

"Seven months, Edna, Huh?...Guess I won our bet, didn't I?" she said, her voice triumphant.

Mrs. Sooner turned quickly to look at them, wondering what Dorothy meant, but Edna looked the other way, and Dorothy reached into the basket for the last package, Mrs. Sooner's.

Eagerly she ripped off the paper and snapped open the lid. Her fingers tore the tissue inside the box revealing the silk christening dress. Though Mrs. Sooner had soaked it a long time the night before, it still was not quite white, and she wondered if Dorothy thought it was dirty from the way she stared, raising one eyebrow slightly. She pulled it off the top to see the next. It was as if she thought this were a bargain table. The blue sweater, the one Gwendolyn loved, was next, and Dorothy yanked it out of the box to hold it up to the light. Everybody stopped talking and stared as Dorothy turned to Mrs. Sooner and said, "Pretty old, huh?"

Quickly Mrs. Sooner stepped up and put her hand on the sweater, caressing it. "Yes," she said eagerly, "it is. Do you like...?"

But question died as she saw Dorothy's lips curl. Dorothy turned to go through the rest of the box. Next she drew out the white leggings, the kind they don't wear, but

that Mrs. Sooner had thought would be good for warmth, just while he was little, and she danced them gleefully in the air.

"What the hell are those?" Edna's sharp voice asked, but Dorothy had begun to laugh so hard she couldn't answer. "God knows," she finally choked out. "It looks like rummage."

Mrs. Sooner stared from one to the other of the laughing faces. Her cheeks burned. "Stop, stop," she screamed, but they only laughed louder. She looked at Dorothy and begged her to stop, but Dorothy was holding her big belly, and tears were falling down her cheeks. Mrs. Sooner felt a shriveling inside her and she understood now.

With dignity, avoiding their eyes, she stepped over the tissue paper on the floor to the table. She smoothed each garment and folded it into the box. Everyone watched, still laughing as she picked up the stockings from the floor where Dorothy had dropped them and placed them on top. Then she turned and, stumbling, crossed the room which was now silent. At her desk she set the box down and cleared the papers off the top into the drawers which she carefully locked as she always did. The hands of the clock blurred grey somewhere between 4:25 and 4:30 when she finished. It was the first time she had ever left early in twenty-two years, but she would make it up over the holiday. On her

way home she would pick up a pastry for Gwendolyn from Magruder's and tell her she had been right after all.

IV

THE APPLE ORCHARD

A sharp fall wind blew through the orchard behind the modernized Pennsylvania farm house shaking loose a dozen or so plump red apples. They didn't roll, as healthy fruit will, but sank heavily into the soft ground. A few split close to the stem, and slowly a thing clear liquid oozed over the body of the fruit into the ground.

Inside the front hall of the house Gail Canfield replaced the receiver to the phone and stared at the dial blankly. The numbers blurred into letters, and she blinked her eyes. Like one of her daughter Barbara's mechanical dolls, she walked over to the red chair opposite Roger's and sank into it. As she leaned back, the breeze from the orchard swept across the living room, and the smell of bad apples wrapped around her neck like a wet, hot cloth. Uttering a sick animal-like cry, she closed her damp hands into fists and forced herself to breath evenly.

She tried to remember the tone of Roger's voice. Could he have realized her silence meant more than figuring if she had enough supper for an extra person? But she was sure he had spoken flatly.

"I've asked an old friend out to the house for supper,

Gail," he said. "He just pulled into Ardmore. You remember Phil Barrows, don't you?"

With Roger's question the thick curtains she had dropped between the present and the ugly past of seven years before had suddenly been pulled apart, and in the thick, hot dust she could see Phil smiling at her with a strangely familiar half-smile across his face, signaling that he understood and could meet that deep animal violence in her. She shuddered and swayed forward a little in her chair.

The year she had left college her parents had told her it would be nice if she married Phil Barrows. Her father said he was from a good family and that when he finished his medical training, he would most likely go in with his father. Her mother liked him because once he sent her roses after a weekend with them in the country. Phil rode and hunted with her brothers out in Mt. Kisco on weekends, and early Sunday mornings, gripping the window edge of the station wagon, choking on the taste of her hangover, she and the other girls would watch them cantering across the open field toward the hedge behind the house, and hear them call over their shoulders to her to spike the coffee. Phil rode her roan, and he held his seat well, gripping the roan's belly with such force Gail thought she took the hedge jerkily--as if she could not get enough breath for it. Phil used to tell her he believed in making an animal know who was master.

And when he took her about New York, he called the waiters by name, and they were never stuck in back, but always sat right on the dance floor. He danced well. All told, their dates together went very smoothly until the night they returned from the January Assembly. They had parked as a matter of course in front of her house. Phil moved from behind the wheel and in a quick motion pulled her so tightly against him she could hardly breath. He kissed her, gently at first, in soft patterns across her cheeks, her forehead and into her neck. Then he kissed her on the mouth until she could feel the hardness of his teeth behind his lips. Violently she twisted out of her evening wrap and turned her body towards his. When she could, she whispered, "Darling?...we...we will go somewhere together ...please?"

Phil's eyes opened slowly, and she looked into them, frantic for his response. But they were cold. She pressed closer to him as if she could make them warm, but he pulled back. His lips curved into an amused smile as he drew the harsh sleeve of his tuxedo across her bare shoulders, avoiding touching her with his fingers. He offered her a cigarette, and then he told her matter-of-factly that it was probably best if they didn't see each other again because he planned to marry Alice Wells in March, and he hadn't realized she was so attracted to him. While she sat numbly,

fighting the choking shame and revulsion, he reached across and pulled up the handle of her door. She fled, stumbling over her long silk evening dress up the stone steps into the house.

After that she dated Roger Canfield, who was number three in the same class as Phil at the Medical School. Roger neither rode horseback nor liked to dance, and he did not attract her physically at all, which at first was a relief. Though Roger spoke awkwardly, he was never sarcastic, and he took everything she said very seriously. After several months his quiet manner no longer irritated her, and she decided to let him fall in love with her.

He proposed in his rolled up shirt sleeves on a rock in Central Park close to the lion's cage. While she wiggled her stocking feet in the cool grass, he had taken off his thick glasses and set them beside him on the rock so he could find them again. With his blue eyes not quite focusing on her, he begged her quite humbly to consider his proposal. She had expected it for some time. His voice jerked unromantically and, feeling rather tender about that, she said, yes, of course she would marry him, as soon as he wished. Trembling, Roger wrapped his thin white arms about her. Though she tried to respond she could not. It was as if she were a wooden mannequin.

They were married at the District Court Building on

York Avenue, and her father refused to go. Her mother pretended it really didn't matter, though on the steps of the building afterwards she confessed she was sick there had not been a big church wedding at St. Andrew's. Roger looked a little like a scarecrow, perspiring in the rented black suit, and Gail was just as glad there could not have been a reception at the Colony with her friends wondering why she had married him.

There was no honeymoon because the internship at New York Hospital started the following Monday, and that was just as well, too. A proper honeymoon with the trimmings at Bermuda or in the Bahamas would only have made more sickening the ugly joke their marriage was. When Roger went on night call the second month and moved over to live at the hospital, Gail pretended she was very sorry and said it didn't seem fair so soon after being married, but that she could keep busy enough, cleaning the apartment, for instance.

It was a cold-water, three-room flat on 163rd street in the colored district, but close to the hospital, and there were cockroaches under the sink. If she dug back in the cupboards, they began to crawl toward her across the shelf up from the pipes. More than once she ran screaming out of the apartment, feeling them all over her arms. Her parents encouraged her to come across town to the big house whenever she wanted, and sometimes, when she thought she couldn't

stand it any longer, she packed a small suitcase and slept up there, stretching her long legs with relief between fresh white sheets in her own organdy-curtained bedroom, falling at once into a deep sleep as she never could at her apartment.

It was an accident that Phil was there one Thursday afternoon when she came up unexpectedly and her mother was out at the Symphony. She had let herself in by her own key. From the hallway she heard the sound of magazine pages turning, and at once she knew it was Phil. Her legs stiffened as she braced herself against the breakers of fear and fury which crashed over her. Finally she pulled herself together and strode into the room, hands on her hips, her chin raised, and a smile across her face. She stopped directly in front of him.

After a long minute of staring at each other, she told him he could stay. She asked him first why he wasn't in Philadelphia on his internship at Penn General and where Alice was if was supposed to be so married to her. Flippantly Phil answered that he and Alice were through, and that he and medicine were through.

Dropping his voice he reached for her hand and stroking it, he pleaded, "I can't understand how...I...I could have let you go like that." He raised her stiff fingers and kissed them softly, and gradually, despite herself, the

heat of his touch melted her wooden reserve. "Can you... will you ever forgive me, Gail?"

She had no choice from the beginning but to forgive him. All afternoon as he told her of the last six months, she wondered if his marriage could really have been as insufferable as hers. When he offered to drive her home she consented willingly. They stopped for supper at an Italian place they had often gone to before. Though he asked very few questions, he acted as if he understood right away about Roger, and not trying to fight it, she began to feel like a woman again.

While they were sipping liqueurs after dinner, Phil put his hand on her knee. "I could have told you this would happen with Roger, if I had ever thought you..." he said gently.

Gail answered quickly, almost defensively, "Oh no... it's not what you think...He's just..." and reddening, she bit her lip sharply.

Phil smiled. She could have stopped it them, should have--but she didn't want to, and when she asked him into the apartment afterwards she didn't struggle very hard. He pulled her roughly against his tweed coat, covering her face and neck with his lips and begged her to let him stay the night. It was what she wanted and she believed she deserved it. The marriage after all with Roger did not seem to

matter that much.

For the next month Phil came up whenever she was sure Roger would be on duty at the hospital. It was like a game they played, a secret joke on Roger, and she used to laugh like a child about having to fix two breakfasts in the morning. The first one for her and Phil, the other for her and Roger.

The affair ended unexpectedly. One night out of nowhere, a bitter argument arose between her and Phil about the internship he had lost in Philadelphia. Without warning he picked up a Lalique vase which had been a wedding gift from her college roomate who was studying art in Rome, and flung it to the floor. Pieces of thick glass splintered across the room and rolled under the chair, the table and the sofa. Phil walked over the glass, grinding it under his feet. "I've had enough of this mess," he yelled from the door. She had not seen or heard from him again. Even when she wrote him about the baby.

She hoped the baby would miscarry, hoped that by some freak chance it were Roger's, knowing it couldn't possibly be. Two months passed before she allowed herself to believe Phil had run out on her. In desperation one afternoon she went to the church she would have been married in to pray to God with all her soul that the baby would be born dead. She shivered with cold in the church, empty except for a

young boy in a long red robe, polishing the silver cross, and a middle-aged woman behind her in a black straw hat, who sobbed noisily into her gloves. Gail pretended not to hear her and wished resentfully she were able to give way like that.

She didn't tell Roger about Phil even when the baby was born. He came down with her and the nurse from the delivery room and lifted her onto the bed. When she roused from the fog of ether, he was patting her shoulder clumsily over and over till she could have screamed at him not to touch her, but slept instead, and when she woke again he was asleep in the chair beside her. The skin about his eyes was black and there were deep lines on his forehead.

Reluctantly, with effort, she remembered the last night. With the first pains she had sat up and clung to Roger in terror, waiting for what she believed her final judgment. He had put on her shoes for her as she sat helplessly on the edge of the bed, rocking back and forth. He had half-lifted her down the stairs and out to the car, telling her there was nothing to be afraid of, while she screamed at him hysterically that he didn't understand...he couldn't understand. In the delivery room she had held his hand tightly as long as they let her, draining Roger's strength to be delivered of Phil's child.

As if waking from a dream, Gail could have cried to

Roger for his forgiveness, remembering how she had sneered at his sensitivity all year, and how she had refused him her love. Before she closed her eyes to sleep again, she decided that although she could never tell him the whole truth, she would give all of herself to him, freely and gratefully. And soon she could she would give him his own children. In this way she began gradually to love Roger and in loving him, to understand him.

That was seven years before. But there had been no other children.

Like tiny needles the tears pricked her cheeks and ran down to the perspiration which had collected above the tight collar of her blouse. Just as Gail reached for a handkerchief, the front door unlatched, and she heard a foot set tentatively inside the hallway. It was Barbara.

"Mommie, can I come in now? For a glass of milk?"

Gail raised her head and tried to answer. Oh God, she thought. The screen door slammed, and there was silence while Barbara pulled her feet out of her shoes. As she skipped into the living room, holding her muddy shoes high in the air, Gail looked at her intently for resemblances to Phil, for mannerisms Roger could recognize if he saw the two of them together.

Barbara stopped in front of her mother and peered up at her curiously. "You're crying!" she said, her blue eyes

widening. A large smudge of dark red dirt covered her cheek, and her knees were caked with it.

"No dear, I'm not...My, how did Barbara get so dirty?"

Barbara looked down at her hands, wrinkling her nose at them. "Mud," she said joyfully and wiped her hands on her dress. "Out in the orchard." Tiny clumps of brown apple pulp fell off her dress onto the carpet.

Gail fought down the nausea. "Go and wash up now. Your daddy doesn't want to see you so dirty," she said, keeping her voice even. "And Barbara, take off all your clothes, and put them in the basket...please...dear." She heard her voice rise.

Barbara smiled a little knowing smile she had when her mother was upset. She hesitated a second, smiling that way, and turned obediently. Gail seem heard the upstairs bathroom door close and the water on full. Her last words echoed across the room as she stared down at the carpet. He is coming tonight.

The September sunlight flooded the room polishing the plank oak floor to soft, warm brown. The September sunlight reflected dully against the pewter plates on the mantle and flashed off the glass face of the clock. Gail walked blindly across the floor through their small dining room and into the pantry. After she had washed her hands in scalding water, she reached into the cupboard for a striped glass and

poured milk into it. She laid a fresh oatmeal cookie from the bread box beside it.

She could not have told anyone what she did for the next three hours. As someone asleep, she wanted to move slowly, lethargically, feeding and bathing Barbara, answering her questions. Mechanically she straightened the dining room and watered the ivy in the front window. She started dinner. At the last she cleaned the livingroom, forcing the breath out of her lungs as she swept the dark apple pulp from Barbara's dress onto newspaper. To cut the odor she scrubbed the rug with ammonia and water. It would be darker than the rest of the rug until it dried. Then she, too, bathed and changed into the dark green wool dress which was Roger's favorite.

The Ford drove into the garage a little after seven. Both car doors slammed, and the voices sounded indistinctly through the back door of the kitchen. Her fingers fumbled with the knot of her apron, but before she could untie it completely the door swung open, and Phil loomed there, smiling the familiar smile. His neck had thickened since she had last seen him so that his head seemed to connect directly to his shoulders. One heavy hand covered the door handle; the other bulged the pocket of his grey jacket. He waited for her to speak first, catching her eyes in his--pale green eyes with flecks of yellow, warm as he wished,

warm now. Or cold...cats' eyes. And with relief she realised she loathed him. She tried to see around to Roger on the steps, but Phil deliberately blocked her view as he stepped toward her.

"Well, Gail Canfield," he said, leaning to kiss her.

She backed away and knocked her hip into the point of the table. Wincing she thrust her hand at him. As if he thought this was their old game, he took it in both of his, and his fingers pressed here lightly, demanding response. She jerked away, and he smiled again, slowly. It was a familiar smile because it was Barbara's.

Roger was waiting on the doorstep unaware of what had happened. "Hi, Darling," she called and ran to him. He folded her tightly to him and she wrinkled her nose at the leather and alcohol doctor's smell she always teased him about.

Kissing her firmly and winking back, Roger disengaged his arms elaborately. "Come on into the livingroom, Phil," he said, calling over her head. "We'll see how good Gail was to us."

To hide her trembling, Gail turned to the stove and, opening the oven, set the chicken casserole inside. "I'll be right in," she said. She handed Roger a plate of cheese and crackers on his way through the swinging door. "Why don't you two go ahead?"

Roger passed on into the pantry, but Phil stilled the door with a quick movement. She ignored him and turned to the counter, picking up the fruit knife to slice the oranges. He watched her quick regular motions with the knife.

"Well, the little woman," he murmured. "Seven years and one child...only one?...later. Who would have thought?"

Without a word she turned her head and pushed by him into the pantry and livingroom.

"Martini or Old-Fashioned?" Roger called from the bar cabinet to Phil who followed behind her. He held up the glass for each.

"Martini. A good dry one."

Roger nodded and measured the vermouth, holding the jigger up to the light. "Phil dropped by just before I called you, Gail." His voice seemed natural, but when he put the top on the shaker and raised it stiff-armed from his body, his mouth tightened. He shook the glass very hard--longer than he needed to, and he wouldn't look at her as he handed her Phil's glass. She carried it in silence to him where he sat by the fireplace in Roger's chair.

Roger brought her drink with his to the sofa, sliding cork coasters underneath them on the coffee table. Almost as if Phil were taking an inventory, he gazed intently about the room. At once all the pleasure Gail had always felt in the room, spacious and warm with solid beams overhead washed away. She knew Phil was guessing now how much good things

still meant to her, and she writhed inwardly as she swallowed her drink.

"Sure beats your cold water place on 163rd street, doesn't it?" he asked finally.

She twisted her glass round and round, staring through the pale yellow liquid to the end of the stem. Roger's face was expressionless. She tried frantically to remember if he had ever been home when Phil was there in the apartment. Then she thought of the birthday party to which Phil had brought a date she had picked out for him, one of her college friends who worked for Doubleday.

"Guess you haven't done badly at all, have you, Rober?"

Roger pulled off his thick glasses and rubbed his eyes before he answered. "Well, it's a hell of a lot better than school and interning. Couldn't pay me to go through that grind again." He ran his hand through his straight dark hair. "Bought out an old GP five years ago," he said. We moved into this house as soon as we could. Liked the orchard especially."

Even Phil could have recognized the quiet pride in his voice. Gail's throat tightened with the sweet ache of remembering the long Sundays when they had tramped up and down quiet lanes behind the Pike and climbed over the rough stone walls or post fences to wander through orchards and gardens that seemed to belong to no one else. Taking a sudden turn

on Wyndam Lane one afternoon, they saw the road drop at their feet, and a quarter-mile away down the long hill floated clouds of fragrant white blossoms. Holding hands, skipping and laughing like children, they reached the bottom of the hill breathless. They found a rusty gate and, pushing through, walked among the gnarled and twisted apple trunks. After awhile, they found what they believed to be an old barn. The frames were broken, and the door was hanging by one hinge. By the following weekend, however, they had figured out how they could turn it into a home, and they decided to look up the owner, a farmer, they heard, from Darby up the Line.

He wore bib overalls, and as he talked he rubbed the back of his neck. It was brown and laced with little lines. "Sure," he said. "Sure. Those trees aren't no good to me. Apples rot before they fall. Sure....I'll sell." He told them that the barn was the original farmhouse, and excitedly Gail broke in that, so far as she was concerned, it didn't matter about the apples. "I don't can anyway," she explained.

As soon as they could get the house wired for light and cooking, they moved in, and from then on, every Sunday and free evening they spent working on it. Gail scrubbed and painted and sanded down the floors to the original solid oak while Roger strengthened the foundations and replaced some of the supports, pulling and straining at beams two men

together wouldn't have touched. Gradually they rebuilt the house together.

Summer evenings they ate their meals outside where the patio was going to be, and they talked about the house over the coffee, for it was as if the work at last gave them a way to talk together. One warm night, they toasted the house and then themselves with champagne, and Roger went inside for the blankets, and in the moonlight which dappled through the leaves they made love.

Gail glanced around the livingroom sensing the dull silence. Roger dropped his mouth to his drink and quickly tilted his head up and back. As he swallowed, a dark flush rose up his neck and face. She turned to Phil.

"Where have you been?" she asked, ignoring his smile. "Seeing the world?"

"Matter of fact, yes. South America and the Near East, helping set up clinics for the UN." In the glass ashtray on the table beside him, Phil jabbed his cigarette. "Couldn't let four years and two months of valuable internship go down the drain, could I?" He wrinkled his long straight nose in the quick gesture Barbara made when she was irritated.

Gail's hand began to shake so hard that she spilled some of her drink on the carpet as she tried to set it down. As tightly as she could she clasped her fingers together until the rings cut through her flesh.

"Phil's thinking of settling down, Gail," Roger said evenly. "Around here."

"Ardmore?"

Phil bowed his head slowly. "I'm trying to persuade your husband he needs a...partner." He shifted in his chair and stuck his legs straight into the room. "He says he doesn't."

"But, how...could...you...?" she looked at Roger. How could Phil practice medicine she wondered without the training? Roger turned his head away. Suddenly the room was stifling, and Gail pulled at her throat again as if she might choke on the mustiness she could not swallow. Hardly trusting her voice, she mumbled about dinner and left the room.

When she returned, Roger stood. "I was just telling Phil about Barbara. He asked to see her." He paused. "I'll get her for you."

Gail stared at him. "No," she said loudly. "No... don't. No...please don't. She's asleep now." Roger frowned and she brushed at the tears which formed in her eyes." The food's ready now, Roger. Please," she pleaded.

As Phil crossed the room to take her arm into dinner, Barbara's half smile again split his face. It was a smile to tell her he intended to use their secret every bit it was worth to her, and in panic she realized what was really behind his casual visit. Furiously, she broke ahead and

pulled her own chair back from the table.

Dinner was a nightmare--a cacophony of sounds which echoed in and out of the mirror over the sideboard and off the white walls. When Gail thought she could stand it no longer, she fixed her eyes on a black fly which slowly crawled up the long white curtains and disappeared under the cornice. Then she watched the candle flickering against the walls, throwing gray shadows on all sides of them, and although she talked and nodded with them, she did not really hear anything that was said all through the meal.

Afterwards she set the coffee tray on the table in front of the sofa. When she had poured them each a cup, she sank stiffly against the cushions. She didn't dare look at Roger. Across the room the mantle clock ticked.

When it struck nine, Roger quickly gulped the last of his coffee and stood. "I have to pay a house call on Mrs. Palmer, Gail," she heard him say as if he were speaking through a long, dark corridor. "I won't be long."

She jerked to attention. Phil didn't move from the chair as she went with Roger to the door. She wanted to stroke Roger's cheek and smile far into his eyes and tell him to come home quickly for she loved him, but she knew he did not want her to touch even his coat. She stood back, miserable, her eyes on the floor. After the door shut, she went down to the bench in the corner, as far from Phil as

she could be. She folded her arms tightly underneath her breasts.

Phil gestured toward the cigarettes in his pocket. "Smoke?"

She shook her head.

He ducked his head to light a cigarette. The flame was yellow between his fingers. "Not even the minor vices now?"

She didn't flinch. "Why are you here?" she asked coldly.

"I find it quite comfortable here," he said unbuttoning his collar and pulling loose his tie. "Besides I need a job... and I thought of Roger Canfield. I figured he'd do all right." He glanced around the room from Roger's chair. "With you pushing him, I knew he'd make money."

It was too much. She sprang to her feet and ran to him. "Don't you say that!" she cried. She doubled her fists and waved them up and down at him.

Phil laughed aloud but didn't move from the chair. "You mean it isn't so anymore?" he asked scornfully.

It was a useless gesture, she thought, and she swayed as she felt her defenses against him drop away. "I'm different, Phil," she said faintly. "I've grown some."

"Didn't hear you," he said, blowing a smoke ring into her face. "I thought what a hospitable wife Roger has, too." He smiled and leaned back into the cushion. "And there's

Barbara, of course."

Not thinking, she stepped forward until she was close enough to touch his shoulder. She faintly heard the clock ticking directly behind her. "Get out of here," she flared. "Can't you see there's no place for you here?" Her voice rose.

While she spoke, Phil came slowly to his feet. He gazed down at her. "Oh, I don't know. Barbara's just as much mine as yours, you know."

She replied with certainty. "That's not true. No court will agree."

Without warning his eyes and voice softened, and he stretched out his hand, almost touching her neck. "Gail... Gail, truthfully, aren't you bored with him?"

Before she could answer, he stroked her cheek lightly and moved closer.

"No," she cried. "No, I'm not!" She twisted away from him until she was behind Roger's chair. Stumbling over the brass fireguard, she grabbed for the mantle for support. Phil took another step toward her and stepped lightly over the fireguard. Frantically she backed away and felt the wall push her forward again. She was trapped--blocked on one side by Phil and on the other by Roger's chair and lamp table.

"Phil...Phil, oh please!" she begged. "What do you want?"

"I told you," he said softly into her ear. "A job. For just six months till I pay some bills. And when I leave, if you like, you and Barbara can come with me." He ran his hands down her arm and back around her narrow waist, pressing his fingers up under her ribs so she could hardly breathe.

Gail jerked away, and beating her elbows against the walls on either side of her as a moth flutters against a window she began to cry hysterically. "For God's sake, Phil. Don't you see? I love Roger!" she sobbed. "I want to make it up to him."

"To hell with Roger." Phil tightened his hold. "You've got to make him take me in."

Violently she somehow lurched away and reached for the lamp on the table. She lifted it high over her head, her knuckles scraping the wall behind her. "Get out of here," she screamed. "I don't want to see you any more. Now get out." She waved the lamp.

He stood there, the maddening smile spreading across his face. His eyes hardened. "Temper, temper. Not even a kiss goodnight?"

She raised the lamp higher. "Get out," she screamed again.

"All right. All right," he said soothingly and backed away. When he reached the door, he turned. "I'll stop by the office tomorrow." He shut the door gently behind him.

and she heard his footsteps on the brick walk.

Probably she held the heavy brass lamp for a full minute before she realized its weight and lowered it slowly in front of her, unbelievably, and stared at it. Her grip loosened, and the lamp crashed to her feet. The bulb smashed. She turned away and walked to the center of the room and then round and round the room with her hands clenched tightly against her throat. After awhile she stopped, but the room turned without her as if she had stepped off a merry-go-round which spun crazily. At last it too slowed.

She went into the kitchen and began to straighten up. Carefully, deliberately, she washed the dishes and put them away, concentrating with intense effort on each motion. When she had finished, she wiped the counters and stove clean of crumbs and grease with a sponge and went upstairs to change into her bathrobe. She closed her mind tightly to all that had happened.

In the nursery she walked over to the bed in the corner. Barbara was curled way down, her face hidden under the blue quilt. Gail straightened her and tucked her in tightly and kissed her temple. "Sleep tight," she whispered. Barbara stirred and turned over.

Downstairs she crumpled into her chair. She was dragged awake by the bells ringing eleven, and she shook her head to break out of a terrible dream in which she was in

the orchard kneeling on the ground where the apples had dropped. Wide awake she examined her hands, turning them over and over, spreading her fingers as if there was brown pulp between them. Almost suffocating, she ran to open the curtains and window, but the real odor of the fallen fruit choked her, and she turned from the window, coughing.

At last the Ford pulled into the gravel drive, and she hurried to the back door. Roger didn't smile as he came across the garage. From the steps he looked beyond her through the pantry into the livingroom. "Has Phil left?" he asked tonlessly.

She pressed her hot cheek against his shoulder. "A long time ago," she murmured. Roger backed away from her.

When they were in the other room, she waited for him to speak first. "Well, how was it to see him again?" he asked, looking past her to the open window. The linen curtains billowed in the air.

"I don't know. He hasn't changed. "

Roger looked directly at her. "Seriously, Gail, how would you feel if he came in with me?"

She twisted her hands in her lap and started to speak, but she couldn't. Finally she stood. "Can't we talk about it in the morning?"

Tiredly Roger drew off his glasses and set them on the table. "Wo!" he began loudly and broke off. She followed his eyes to the lamp on the floor and the tiny fragments of

smashed bulb at his feet. The sickening odor from the orchard caught in her throat and hardly realizing what she did, Gail ran to him, knelt by his feet, hardly aware of her bare knee on the crushed glass. She bit her lip and pressed the hollor of her cheek against his knee. "You'll hate me," she whispered.

She felt Roger lean forward in the chair. He pulled her head up and cupped her burning face in his hands, wiping her tears away with his thumbs. "No," he said. "No, I won't." His mouth twisted as he spoke, and he seemed to swallow with difficulty.

She dropped her head again on his knee sobbing while he waited, stroking the side of her head, lifting her hair that had fallen over her eyes and catching it gently behind her ear.

She dredged deeply for the words. "I was lonely... sorry for myself. And I thought you didn't care what I gave up to marry you. My family...and everything."

She closed her eyes and tears fell down her cheeks, and her lips were salty from the tears and she stopped to run her tongue over them. "Oh, Roger," she sobbed. "He... he said if I didn't make you take him, he'd tell you." The tears caught in her throat, and she choked. "We...we had an affair," she finally said. The place her face lay on Roger's trousers was damp and cold. "Barbara--she is Phil's child."

She shuddered and closed her eyes, smelling the wet wool. "I despise him," she cried. "Believe me!" She held her arms tightly about his legs, and for the first time she felt the glass under her knees. Roger's hand stroking her head hesitated just a second and then continued. "Can you ever forgive me, Roger?" she sobbed.

The clock ticked steadily behind her, and after awhile, a breeze of fresh air seemed to clean the room, and Roger said quietly, "I know she is, Gail. I know."

She raised her head. A tear dropped down his cheek and caught in the corner of his mouth. His eyes were suddenly filled with them. "You know?" she asked hesitantly.

"Yes. All along. But I had to wait...you had to tell me. I had to know if you still loved him."

She was in his lap then, her arms tightly wound around his neck and kissing his wet cheeks. "Oh, and all along, and you still loved me. Still?" she asked incredulously.

He held her close around the waist. His voice was hoarse. "Gail, I knew before we married--you and I..." he stopped. "I could never have children." He closed his eyes briefly."Gail it wasn't my fault believe me. But... if I had told you..." Convulsively at first, then more easily, he told her he had been afraid she would not marry him if she knew; that he had understood from the very beginning what their marriage was and yet been unable to tell

her or say he forgave her, because he thought she might still love Phil. With his palm flat on her cheek he cradled her head against his neck.

"It will be all right now," he said huskily.

After awhile, Gail went over to close the window. "It's terrible out there," she said, turning back into the room, her hand still on the casement.

"I know," Roger said. "We'll try to clean it up in the morning."

V

IN THE CASTLEGUARD VALLEY

It was cold outside. Shaking, Ed Stevens opened the door of the Lake Louise station and felt the sharp wind push against the back of his new nylon parka. The gust picked up a few forms off the ledge of the ticket window across the waiting room, and when the station master straightened after stooping for them he frowned. Stevens smiled back.

"Sorry," he said. "Stiff breeze out there." He crushed under his feet the dry leaves which had blown in with him. "Back east it's still summer."

The station was different from the locker-lined commuter stops Stevens knew at home. For one thing, it was dead silent except for the ticking of the walnut-cased clock on the far wall. J. Stockton, Geneva, the inscription read. And the windows were high and old-fashioned, set in like the ones built for such people as the Fords who moved out to Grosse Point in the '90s. Next to the old-fashioned scales was a paneled door and above it a white porcelain sign lettered in Dutch blue.

There was no one else in the station but the bald-headed station master with the hornrims and sour expression behind the ticket window, but Stevens, who always felt uneasy when

he was alone with someone who wasn't talking, strode between the wide planked benches and spread his arms sidewise on the ledge.

"I'm from the States," he said, "from Detroit."

The Canadian glanced up and then back at his papers before he reached for a heavy wooden stamp, which balanced with others on a rack in front of him, felt it to see how damp it was, and began to stamp methodically "RECEIVED--SEPTEMBER" on the yellow forms.

Stevens watched. "I came on ahead of my boy to arrange everything," he said. "We're going to backpack into the Castleguard River Valley, south of the icefields." He paused. "Paul's thirteen." He hoped the other would look up again, but the man's stamp hesitated in the air just a second longer before he brought it down on the next form.

"Getting pretty late in the season, isn't it?" he asked softly, not raising his eyes as he stamped another form. "But you talk like you know what your're doing," he added. "That train will be here in eight minutes." And he turned, leaving Stevens staring at the smooth back of a green gabardine blouse.

Stevens shrugged and walked away. When he closed the door to the station behind him, he closed it firmly, almost banged it, in fact, and then he stuffed his hands high into his parka pockets and strode down the platform, scuffing at

the dust as he walked. He wished Paul would come. It had been a year since he'd seen the rascal.

The only other person around was the gardener, an old man in a heavy grey and black jacket, digging up the neat circles of dead iris leaves, and tamping the earth solemnly afterwards. After he filled the wheelbarrow, he rolled it out of sight behind the building. When he returned for the next load, the red crossing light was already blinking and the striped gates were down. The boy would be here any minute, and for ten days they would pretend, as they did every summer, that they were just like any other father and son. They would pretend they knew each other and knew how to talk together. For a long moment, listening to the clanging bell on the engine become louder, Stevens was half-afraid Marjorie had changed her mind after all, not trusting Paul in his care on this kind of vacation, when there wouldn't be anyone else around. It wasn't like going to the Jersey coast. He squinted, trying to separate the train from trees way down the track, and when his eyes found the black dot moving, growing bigger, closer, he realized his fingers in his pockets had clenched tightly into fists.

The train, an electric engine and two small passenger cars, blocked the crossing now, and between the cars Stevens finally saw the sturdy figure of his son with one hand braced against the last jerk. Thank God, he had really come. Paul

was well-bundled, with a bright red scarf and a red Montgomery Ward hunting jacket which Marjorie must have bought him especially for the trip.

Paul waved eagerly and jumped off the train while it was still moving. He seemed about to kiss his father in the excitement, but Stevens awkwardly thrust out his hand so Paul pumped it instead. He had shot up during the year almost to Stevens' shoulder, and he'd lost the slight chubbiness Stevens had kidded him about the summer before.

"Great to see you again, son. How are you? Have a good trip? Well, are you ready for the big expedition?" His questions sounded too hearty to him, but the boy nodded and his eyes shone. A breeze ran across his cropped hair as the train pulled away from the platform, and he reached up as if to keep it from tickling.

"New haircut?" Stevens asked, relieved to talk about that.

"Yes, sir, day before yesterday. Mother made me..." He paused and grinning spontaneously said, "Gee, Dad, I'm sure glad...surely glad...I could come. Thanks an awful lot for asking me."

"Oh, that okay," Stevens said, reaching for the suitcase quickly. "Here, let's get your gear to the station wagon." He pointed to the car parked a hundred feet away beside the station.

Paul made several trips back and forth from the platform for his sleeping bag and other equipment while Stevens arranged the seat for him. Finally as they drove away from the station, Stevens saw that the old gardener had paused, shovel in mid-air, to watch them with a funny expression on his face.

He felt all right again behind the wheel of the new Buick, letting up on the accelerator as he approached the curves, speeding up as he took them with the confidence of a man who has driven a good deal and knows what a car can and cannot do. Robinson Motors was a pretty good outfit to work for...with the benefits; even a junior salesman like himself who topped the quota had the use of any car in the showroom for his vacation. Stevens had chosen the Buick wagon because all the summer ads showed those families unloading gear from one just like it, with Yosemite Falls or Old Faithful or whatever spraying so close behind them you wondered they weren't wet. Stevens turned north on the main Banff-Jasper highway, and the car moved smoothly at 65, even over the ruts. Someday he'd buy a car like that.

After the heater warmed up, Stevens struggled out of his parka, and Paul carefully folded it for him, smoothing it gently with the palm of his hand. When he had settled around again, he asked, "Will we sleep out tonight, Dad?"

"Under the stars, Paul," he answered, and because it

sounded Western he repeated, "Under the stars."

Paul looked out his window for five minutes before he turned again. "Do you know yet where we're going?"

"Sure. Like to hear?"

Paul nodded vigorously.

"Well, we leave this road in about fifty miles, and we hike along the Alexandra River. That joins the Bow River over there." He jerked his head left. "And then we move up the Castleguard."

Paul leaned across him to look out at the swirling white water below the embankment, and Stevens went on. He told Paul that the country they were going into was primitive and so remote that only ten men maybe had been there in the last year. They would hike to the Continental Divide, backbone of the continent. He had taken that phrase from the guidebook. When Paul asked if there were any wild animals, Stevens whistled slowly.

"Wild animals? I'll say. Bear. Moose. And mountain goats, and maybe even mountain lion." He glanced over at Paul, who listened intently, his mouth slightly open, and somehow he couldn't help himself even though it wasn't true. "Of course, it won't be like my trip in Alaska last June, hunting Kodiac. But this will be wild enough."

Paul thought for a minute, obviously impressed--the way Marjorie had been when he'd told her he was the General Mana-

ger of Smith Car Sales, before they were married, because after all that's what he was going to be. But she hadn't seen it that way afterwards when she found out he was only a salesman. Paul pointed out the window at a fin-like peak to the west. "What's that?"

"Mount Brussels, Paul," he guessed, glad again for the guide.

"Oh," Paul gazed at it. "How tall is that one?"

Stevens guessed about 11,000.

It was good for the boy to ask him things and listen respectfully--the way a kid should with his father. Things would be easier this year between them and maybe back in Detroit he could see something of Paul, too. Sundays they could sail and fish. Maybe go duck-hunting in the fall along Lake St. Clair. Stevens smiled to himself a little, and in spite of himself reached over to pat Paul's knee, feeling clumsy and shy about it afterwards.

The week before the slopes on their right had been golden with turned larch needles, but now the trees were black and ugly with hanging squaw hair, their needles on the ground dusting the grey highway gold, and the wheel treads of the last tourists had drawn long black lines across them. They had followed the treads for about thirty miles when suddenly, coming around one of the long curves, Stevens had to swerve quickly to miss a mountain goat in the middle of the road. The animal leaped away crazily, scrambling right

and left up the highway cut as if his life depended on it, and Stevens laughed harshly.

"The little runt!" he said. "Scared to death."

When they passed a marshy place, Stevens stopped the car and pointed out the moose digging for roots under the water. He blasted the horn, and the huge animal jerked up his head nervously. And when he lowered his shoulders as if he might charge them, Stevens felt the cold chill clamp his stomach even though they were in the car. He accelerated.

"Can't be too careful with that fellow," he explained to Paul when they were well past, and he rubbed his palms off on his knees, one at a time.

He'd hated any big animal since his father got him the great Dane, a vicious-tempered dog, which used to knock him down, knowing he was frightened. "Stand up to him, or he'll know you're yellow," his father used to yell if he backed away when the dog jumped on him. Or "Hit him back, Ed," but always he would finally turn and run for the apple tree or the garage roof, and his father would swear bitterly at him and his brothers laugh themselves sick. The dog would run around and among them, but never bothering them. Ed would wait till they all left, and the Great Dane, snapping, growling, half-jumping up the side of the garage as if he could climb it, grew bored, too, and then trembling Ed would creep to the edge of the roof and jump for the flower

bed, and come into supper late, not meeting the scornful eyes.

When Paul saw the first markers for the Alexandra Valley warden, he pulled his jacket and the parka forward and was out of the car before it stopped in front of the log cabin station. The warden was wiping his mouth with a napkin when he answered Paul's knock. He was a broad-shouldered, deeply tanned man, and his hair, streaked with white, was combed long and flat across his head. He smiled as if he were surprised to see anybody.

"Come on in. Just finishing lunch," he said bluntly, and added, "care for some?"

"No thanks." Stevens glanced behind the man into the dark cabin, half-doubting if this one in his shirtsleeves could be the regular warden. "I just wanted to sign in. They told me back in Banff about that regulation."

"Well, if you don't mind sitting down just a minute while I finish my sandwich," the warden said, "I'll help you." He spoke firmly, with a faint Scots accent.

"Here," he said, and in one motion he pulled two wooden chairs up to the table, folded the regional map to make space for the two thick mugs he set out for them, and before either could refuse, he poured steaming strong coffee from the speckled blue pot on the wood range.

Stevens smiled a little at Paul's surprise while the

warden pulled up his own chair and joined them. He reached for half of a large Spam sandwich and waved it in the direction of the mountains out the window.

"Where you headed, sir? Eagle's Nest?"

"No, the Castleguard Valley. For five or six days, depending on how the boy makes out." Stevens looked at Paul, who blushed into the steam from his mug. "His first pack trip, and I don't want to push him."

"I see," said the warden slowly and took another bite. "The Castleguard? You folks are ambitious I'd say." He swallowed. "Don't you think it's late in the season for that trip?" He smiled openly at Stevens as he spoke, and added, "September's a strange month around here."

Christ, thought Stevens, they're all so free with the advice. The warden went on.

"Why don't you take a shorter trip over two nights, up to Eagle's Nest, past the falls. Good view of the icefields from there, too." He finished the last crust and pushed his plate away. He reached into his shirt pocket for a package of American cigarettes, Camels, and offered one to Stevens, who shook his head and swallowed down his irritation at the man's self-assurance. It was as if he were trying to make him look silly.

"You talk as if you thought we weren't good enough for the Castleguard trip," he said.

The warden lit his own cigarette and exhaled. "No, sir, no." I didn't say that at all. I'd question anyone, myself even, going in there now.

Stevens snorted, but the warden continued. "Mating season now for one thing. Your bull moose are no longer in velvet, and the bear are getting ready to hibernate. They're off the ridges now." He smiled reassuringly at Paul, who was taking in every syllable. "Why you can smell winter." He squinted out the window and pointed. "Look there. Snow below the 6000foot level." He stared out there silently before turning back. "More coffee?"

Stevens shook his head. "You mean...we can't go? You're refusing to let us go?" he pressed.

The warden chuckled softly. "Hell, no, I can't do that. It's completely up to you. But, well, you're asking for trouble, and it's my job to tell you so."

A little frown puckered Paul's forehead as he looked down at his shoes and then up at Stevens, eyelids wide and trembling. Suddenly Stevens responded to the boy's plea with unfamiliar determination, and he stiffened against his chair. Here he could prove himself once and for all to his son, to everyone, to Marjorie too, though it was only the principle with her now. He would show them he didn't chicken out in the rough places. He would show them he could take it, too, and he'd be damned if he'd back down in front of this know-it-all warden. It was a kind of test.

He slammed his mug so hard coffee spilled onto the white oilcloth, and Paul jumped back. Shoving his chair back from the table, Stevens stood.

"I'm not afraid," he said defiantly, thrusting out his chin.

Paul stood, too, twisting the top button on his jacket.

The warden jerked his head up. "That's hardly the point," he said quietly.

It burned Stevens to be talked to like a punk kid, and with Paul there. "I'll sign out right now, and save you any more trouble," he said.

The warden shrugged and reached back for the pad and pencil hanging on the nail by the window. When he had their names and addresses and the time that they expected to be back, he reached for the map he had shoved aside earlier.

"Here," he said, flattening it, "the trail starts across the small footbridge over the Alexandra a few hundred yards from here." Although anybody could see it, he carefully traced his finger along the black line west and then north, apparently unaware of the coffee seeping through the paper. "If I don't hear from you by 8:00 p.m. of September 28th, I will have to send in a search party."

Stevens pulled his parka zipper up and down, but the warden kept on.

"When the trail turns north, this side of the Castle-guard right here," and he pointed to a small x on the map, "You'll find a good campsite with water in the clearing. My trail crew use the small closed shelter there during the summer." He folded up the map as he spoke. "And you'd better keep your eyes out for moose and grizzly bears, Mr. Stevens. If you see one on the trail, give him the right of way. Don't keep food around your tent." He talked as if he were giving orders. "But I guess you know things like that."

"Yeah, I guess we can take care of ourselves," Stevens answered, turning abruptly to the door. "Come on, son," he called over his shoulder. Let's get out of here."

As they walked out, Paul turned back to the warden. "Sir, don't worry about us. My father's had lots of experience hunting and everything in Alaska. He knows a whole lot about hiking and climbing, too."

The warden smiled slightly and touched the boy's shoulder for a second. "Have a good trip, Paul," he said. "You can leave your car by the barn," he called after them as they walked out the door over to the car.

It took longer than Stevens figured to get ready after they had dragged everything out in the tall grass on the side of the car away from the cabin. Stevens felt particularly pleased with his success in matching the list Field and Stream had suggested, even to the dried cream of mush-

room soup, which he'd bought in Calgary. And on his own, because he liked it, he had added extra bacon. That was for breakfast. Before he was finished, he had to repack the mountain tent so that it fit on the top of the packboard, but no matter how he stowed the pack it seemed to weight a good ten pounds more than the magazine's estimate. Paul carried his own sleeping bag, their extra sweaters and the underclothing.

At four they took off, dropping at once to the small plank bridge over the river and climbing a hundred feet up the gravel bank. The trail started steadily, gradually up through the willows which had lost their leaves on it, and Paul led, moving along equally steadily, so steadily in fact that when they hit the first downhill stretch and Stevens caught his breathe, he called ahead. "Slow down or you'll poop out early. Been practicing or something, Paul?"

Paul looked around his pack grinning. "Twenty blocks a day all summer," he answered proudly.

They followed the dusty, leaf-covered trail for a good hour while it paralleled the highway and then gradually turned west to the Divide, and soon the sounds of traffic faded, and the private chattering of the pine squirrels or the harsh caw of a black crow in flight was all they heard beyond their own breathing. Occasionally, a little rivulet flowed across the trail, which they had to step across on

flat stones spaced as if for their convenience. At the second stream, Stevens pack threw his weight off so that he splashed ankle-deep in the water, soaking the lower part of his trousers, and when the pale sun dropped into the trees he became more and more conscious of the cold, wet trousers and socks. Several times he called ahead to Paul to watch for a good campsite.

It was dusk before they found a wide clearing with a stream, and even so, that was barely deep enough to dip a cup of water without dipping dirt, too. All at once it was dark, and Paul had to hold the light so Stevens could see to pound the tent stakes. They used the Primus stove to cook, and squatting over it in the damp grass near the stream, heads together and knees almost touching, Stevens felt Paul's warm breath on his face. He cursed at the stove when it would not light at first and then flared so high they had to turn it off and start over again.

"Damn thing," he said, striking his fourth match against the inside of the lid. "Knew it was a lemon when I bought it."

"Damn thing," echoed Paul, and laughing spilled over backwards onto the damp grass. Strangely, Stevens found himself laughing with Paul.

They tried the beef stew that night because it was on top, and Paul watched with wonder as the dehydrated vegetab-

les grew till they had to add more water. They had enough for six people, just as the package said. It was hot and solid and all they had that night to eat; so they finished it. Afterwards they carried the mesakits to the stream, and while Paul steadied the flashlight again, Stevens knelt on the dark green moss and rubbed icy sand on them till they were clean. When he stood, his knees were wet, and he felt miserable and angry with everything. His legs ached, too, and his fingers, numb, stuck to the cold metal. The wind came up and despite the lined parka, he shook with the cold.

"Bedtime, Paul," he said trying to keep the irritation out of his voice. He tried to tie the packsacks in the branches of an aspen away from the tent, but they kept slipping out, and he was too cold to bother; so he just laid them by the trunk.

A few minutes later inside the tent, he found Paul already asleep, the top of his sleeping bag rising and falling with steady deep breaths, and only the top of his shorn head showing.

Smart aleck warden, Stevens thought, as he slipped his legs into the clammy bag. He wiggled down till he felt the end, and he tried to stretch out flat, but under the small of his back was a large root he had missed when he pitched the tent. He twisted from side to side, hitting the root

with each turn, and finally he drew up his knees almost to his chest and slept. Every branch that snapped during the night jerked him awake, and he sat up shaking to hear only the roar of the river through the trees.

In the morning cold feet and a full bladder sent him into the bitter cold. He could hardly move at first, he was so stiff from the cramped position he had slept in. Coffee would help, he decided, and before Paul awoke, he had the Primus going inside the tent and the bacon cooking. With all the tent flaps down, it was soon warm enough to dress comfortably.

A thick white frost had layered the woods and the clearing while they slept, and the trail was marked by an even indentation in the white. They moved quickly over it, shivering with the sweat that wet their shirts under the parkas they didn't dare strip, and they wished for the sun. The pale green aspen trunks and the brushy red willows blocked any morning sun, and only by the narrow strip of blue sky above them could they know that outside these dark woods it was bright and clear and perhaps warm. They spoke very little to each other, but glided soundlessly along the trail, Paul ten yards ahead, turning every now and then to see if his father still followed.

Once Stevens heard heavy hooves thud in the brush toward the river, and fear choked him so that he couldn't move or

call out to Paul, who was oblivious to the danger. The animal never crossed their trail but must have dropped to the Alexandra which rumbled steadily and showed brilliant white flashes through the trees. Just when it seemed they would never come to it or walk again in sunlight, they dropped suddenly through the trees, heard the water swirling in violent whirlpools against some logs jammed beside the bank, and they were on the bank, smiling dumbly in the warmth, ignoring the river breeze which slapped at their damp clothes.

"Look, Dad," cried Paul loudly. "Will you look at those mountains?"

Stevens raised his eyes from the shining water to look up-river past him. He caught his breath.

A few miles away, pushing out of the river itself into the deep blue air of colder skies like tips of a silver crown swept three pinnacles so dazzling he squinted.

"What are those called?"

"The Alexandra mountains," Stevens answered.

They stared quietly together, and shifting their shoulder straps away from the sore places they moved along the shore trail that would take them to the base of those peaks. All morning they hiked, but still the mountains seemed no closer, and Stevens was almost glad. He started thinking that if he were a Romey he might feel that he was trying to

reach heaven, or paradise, or whatever they called it, in that perfection of ice, and couldn't quite, but this idea made him so uneasy he pushed it away, and he felt again he did not want to come too close to those mountains. He was a man who was impressed only by what man could make with his hands: a good clean-lined car body or the whirring, jeweled insides of a watch. He liked to control things around him, liked to turn on his Westinghouse air-conditioning if he was hot, or turn up the thermostat if he was cold. He knew that he could explain the workings of a car or a watch or the air-conditioner. He wasn't so sure about the mountains, which seemed to be there anyway, and he felt he should whisper as if he were in church or something. He didn't know, and he didn't think he liked it much.

Paul on the other hand, hardly pausing for breath, began to talk and chatter like a little kid, and he even skipped a little in excitement. "Look," he cried, "look, Dad, at the snow blowing!"

High on the left slope of the middle peak what had seemed a white cloud was, as Paul said, really snow twisting in some mischievous current of air.

Paul hopped and danced along the trail, caught the toe of his shoe on a root, almost slipped once off the bank into the water, and turned to face his father while he skipped backwards, but he never stopped his flow of words. He

talked about what kind of ice cream he liked best, strawberry; about how his appendicitus scar was itching like crazy under his long johns; how he was the champion tree-climber in his neighborhood, though once he'd gotten stuck and his mother had to phone the fire department; how he didn't think he'd mind much the other kids' teasing now--because which one of them went with <u>their</u> fathers on a hike like this? How really, Dad, wasn't it time for lunch?

So at the next dry log they helped each other drop the packs and feeling suddenly light, dizzy as if they had just taken off roller skates, they rubbed at the aching places over their collar-bones. After a bit, Paul untied his bootlaces and wiggled out to the end of the log which went five feet over the water and hesitantly dipped his feet, toe by toe, into the icy water. The river narrowed and whipped faster here over rapids and sharp rocks. Bracing his feet against the log, Stevens reached way down to the water and splashed his face. It was tasteless, and he couldn't drink enough, but it ran like silver down his parched throat. He rested before he ate, suddenly feeling bloated, and sat down on the log with his feet on the bank to steady it so that Paul would not see-saw into the swirling rapids below him. Paul dug for his lunch in his hip pocket and between mouthfuls of pecan and caramel he talked on and on, as if never before had he been heard, and Stevens listened to him.

After lunch with packs which seemed much heavier than before, they trudged on, Stevens behind Paul, and in the clear air beside the river Stevens decided not to tell Paul after all about his job, or his big house, or the cost of his station wagon. Instead, he just listened to the boy, laughed when he did, or nodded sympathetically when he thought Paul wanted that, too, and he felt very close to his son all afternoon. He wondered if this was the way it might be if things had been different, if he had been different, and he ached at the thought of ever going back because he had not known how lonely he was.

They followed the narrowing river until they were in the purple shadows of the peaks, so close to the great wrinkled tongues of the glacier tarnished by the dust and algae that they shivered in the wind sweeping across it toward them. At the very base of the mountains, the pounding of the river grew and with the great rush and splashing of white water, the Castleguard from the north joined the Alexandra.

They left the rivers at the junction, following the trail back into the woods up a steep slope until they came into the cleared space the warden had spoken of with the metal-roofed shelter at the far end. Aspens fringed the clearing, their once gold leaves brown now on the ground. Stevens sent Paul to locate the water they could hear off

to the side while he pitched the tent, wrinkling his nose at the rank smell of stale bacon from the morning. He hammered the stakes a hundred feet in front of the log shelter.

After supper they moved close about the small fire Paul built, and in their world limited by the firelight and fire-warmth they talked very little. Paul was quiet as if the chatter of his voice evoked the emptiness of the black night outside the light of the fire, and he seemed purposely to touch his shoulder against his father's. Once they heard an avalanche rolling and crashing down the steep slopes across the river, and when Stevens felt the boy shake, though it might have been with cold, he drew his arm about his shoulder. The sound of the River's rushing came and went with the wind through the aspens. Every now and then Paul dug the toe of his boot into the burning log and jerked it back when the heat took hold. Together they watched the orange sparks sail into the smoke and flicker out.

Paul saw them first: the red, green and white curtains shaking out across the sky. "Look, Dad, look at that," he cried. "What does it mean?"

Stevens thrust back his head. "Northern Lights, Paul, he said. "I haven't seen those since I was a kid, about your age, over Lake St. Clair." He paused. "I don't know at all what they mean."

"They're beautiful, aren't they, Dad? Just beautiful."

Stevens remembered he'd thought that too and had said so, but his brothers had called him a sissy, and then his oldest brother had told him exactly how they worked as if it were only a lesson in math, and they hadn't seemed so beautiful afterwards.

"Yes, they're beautiful, Paul," he agreed.

"What makes them go like that, Dad?" Paul stood up in his excitement.

"I don't know. It doesn't matter, does it?"

Paul shook his head and laid his hand down on his father's shoulder. "No," he said, and, "I like it here, Dad, with you."

A glow filled Stevens that burned more than the fire on his cheeks and buried deep inside him. "I like it here with you, Paul," he said, almost shyly. He stood, too, and together they watched till Stevens knew that Paul was cold. "Time to turn in," he said. "I'll be along."

After the boy had gone, Stevens stood for a minute to unkink his left knee, and then he turned around his log seat and sat down, closer to the fire. It was dying; so he poked the ashes with the willow stick Paul had used until the log glowed again and a blue tongue of fire licked out of the red and black honey combed cells. It had been a good day, and later when he went inside the tent, it was like going

inside his own house.

He woke once during the night and withdrew reluctantly from the warm bag. On his boots outside he felt snow cold and soft. The valley walls funnelled the snarling wind past the camp, and he was glad to return to the shelter. Paul stirred lightly in his sleep, but he didn't waken.

In the morning as soon as it was light enough, Stevens reached out for the pot of snow and melted it down on the Primus for hot chocolate. When Paul threw his arms out of the sleeping bag to stretch, he shook him gently to keep him from knocking the stove.

"Come on, son, wake up. Breakfast."

Paul slowly opened his blue eyes and smiled sleepily, shaking his head slightly and yawning.

"Will you start the bacon while I fix the back flap?" Paul shook his head again, "Got some snow last night," Stevens added casually, backing away, for he could imagine the effect.

"What?" Paul nearly upset the pot again. "Snow, did you say snow? Whoopee!" He grabbed for the plaid shirt Stevens used for his pillow.

"Simmer down, boy," Stevens said sternly, but grinning as he bent down to go out the front. "And wait a minute till I get back. I'm trying to get the place warm."

The trees about the clearing were black and lifeless in the mauve light, forming patterns of half-crescents where

the snow was drifting against the trunks. Every now and then a branch swung and creaked, and the snow dropped by clumps to the ground. On the smaller brush it caught like blown cotton balls, which dropped heavily and suddenly, not as powder will. There was no promise of warmth in the sky; it was grey, unsmiling. When a huge black crow cawing loudly passed so close overhead that Stevens heard the wings flapping, he felt uneasy for no reason he could figure, and remembered snatches of what the warden had told him.

It was so cold and damp that when he breathed, the frozen air hung there for a minute. He shivered a little and pushed his numb fingers against his thumbs until they could work the stiff window straps. He had just finished with the last one, giving it an extra hard tug before it came free, when he heard a violent crashing noise from the woods off to his left. He froze, and the noise stopped.

"Paul," he whispered through the canvas.

"What's the matter, Dad?"

"Turn off the stove and stay very still."

"What's wrong? What's that noise?"

Stevens didn't answer. The noise came closer and suddenly two black lumps, broke into the opening, bear cubs, one larger than the other, both round and fat with a rich, brown thick fur. They stood uncertainly on the edge of the clearing, their noses twitching.

Stevens backed very slowly, softly, to the trail crew

shelter, keeping down so they wouldn't see him move. When his reaching arm touched the shelter, he turned and with a flying leap clawed through the snow up the corregated tin roof, his boots slipping until his fingers grabbed the ridge, and he flattened against the snow, breathing heavily.

The cubs glided toward the low green tent.

"Dad, where are you?" called Paul.

A few yards away from the tent, the bears hesitated again, sniffing curiously. Stevens knew what the smell was that attracted them: the bacon grease he could smell even from where he was.

"Paul, shut up!" he called from the roof. "Bears."

But Paul thrust his head out the front. "Hey, look at them go! Look!" he cried in delight.

The cubs were headed away to the trees, half-falling over themselves in the snow, but moving fast.

Stevens watched something else now. From the thick brush the cubs had tumbled out of a few minutes before silently loomed a heavy brown animal three or four times their size. In the half light, she seemed more tan than brown and the silver tips of the fur about her eyes glinted. She paused motionless in front of the trees as if she might stand erect. Her humped back and her flat face meant nothing special then to Stevens, and she looked even clumsy to him, until in one controlled motion she swung her head and thick

shoulders toward the tent.

"Paul," he called, "Get out of the tent. Up a tree. Hurry." For a second he thought the bear might turn, satisfied her cubs were safe.

"Which one?" called Paul, as if this were a game.

But before he could answer she charged. Effortlessly she moved across the clearing to the tent, controlled, powerful, terrible in her heavy grace, long claws soundless in the snow.

Paul must have seen or heard her, for he was struggling out of the tent when she reached him, charging the doorway. Stevens could not turn his face, and when Paul called out to him, he could not answer.

"Dad...help!" His voice was muffled. "Come!" Paul cried and each syllable seared Stevens, and still he could not answer or move.

The icy metal ridge of the roof burned his fingers, and he answered each cry only with a deep groan, and when the piercing cries came continuously, becoming one scream, his own body racked with long shudders. Paul at last was quiet, his body twisted in the snow. The bear snorted and shoved at Paul with her dish snout, lifted him off the ground, but Paul lay motionless. She batted him again, and drew back to watch. He didn't stir. A long scratch across Paul's cheek filled with crimson blood which ran down his face

and neck. Stevens felt the sweat run off his hands into the snow, and they started to slip on the burning ridge. He tightened his grip. The bear waited a minute longer, swinging her great shoulders and massive head, but she finally turned away and ambled across the clearing to her cubs waiting halfway up a pair of aspens.

Stevens watched till she was close to the trees before he crept over to the edge of the roof. Paul lay turned on his side one arm twisted behind him. His clothes were ripped across his chest. And at last it hit Stevens. It swept over his body, his legs, his back until he was drowning in his anger, and he cursed the bear with forgotten sounds, but softly, so she would stay away. Gritting his teeth he worked down to the lower edge of the roof. Once he made a sharp tearing noise where he hooked onto a nail, but when the bear swung, he pressed into the roof before she could see him, and since Paul hadn't moved, she continued on across the clearing. Her cubs scrambled out of the trees and together they disappeared into the black woods. Tensing his arms, Stevens reached for the log tie, swung, and landed silently in the snow, knees bent.

Paul stirred and opened his eyes, unable at first to focus them on his father.

"Paul, are you all right?" Stevens knelt, turning the boy's head and cupping the blood-streaked face in his hands.

"Tell me, Paul," he pleaded. "Are you okay?"

Paul started to tremble, and Stevens lifted him a little to slide the jacket under him, and reached his arms about him as if he were just a little kid, and held him tight, rocking him. "Can you hear me now, Paul?"

The boy's body shuddered, and when he recognized Stevens, it became rigid. Stevens had to bend way down to hear him.

"Called you..." he whispered brokenly.

Stevens bit his lip hard and didn't answer.

"Oh, Dad," Paul moaned. "I...needed...you."

"I," Stevens hesitated. "I couldn't come, Paul. I couldn't."

Paul turned his face from his father's.

"Don't you touch me," he said bitterly, pushing feebly at him. "Don't...need help."

Stevens held his arms tighter about the still-shaking body as if he could keep his son that way.

"Paul," he said, "I couldn't." He was pleading now. "Don't you see?"

Paul shoved at him again, weakly.

"No," he said. His voice sounded as parched as if he had cried and run out of tears. "Leave me alone," he said. "Oh...leave me alone, will you." He started sobbing and tried to cover his wet face with his arm.

Carefully Stevens lifted Paul away from him, tucked the jacket about his legs, and put his own parka around his shoulders. He stood heavily. Paul wouldn't even look up at him. Automatically he pulled the sleeping bags out of the torn tent and began to roll them up. When he had finished, he unstrung the tent supports and pulled up the stakes, unaware of the frozen mud and snow under his nails. He stumbled a little as he worked, and an icy wind off the rivers whipped at his cotton shirt, but he felt nothing. And later that day, as they started on the long hike back along the river, Paul limping behind him, he knew his dreaming was over.